

**Carolyn Brendon / Csaba Dégi L. /
Panagiotis Kavouras / Felicity Mitchell**

Webinar

**A new year, a new [ab]normal:
Adapting to Covid-19 in the new academic year**

**ENOHE
(European Network of Ombuds
in Higher Education)**

Occasional Paper Nr. 14

ENOHE
European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education

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ENOHE

European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education

**A new year, a new [ab]normal:
adapting to covid in the new
academic year**

10 December 2020
1500 CET

Chair: Jean Grier, Vice President ENOHE
Facilitator: Jenna Brown, Denver USA

**A CONTINUING WORLDWIDE CRISIS
IN-COUNTRY ADAPTATIONS TO HIGHER
EDUCATION ARRANGEMENTS DURING COVID-19**

Opening remarks:
Josef Leidenfrost, President

Jean Grier:

University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Scotland

A very warm welcome to everyone. I'm very glad you can join us today. As Josef said, it's good morning in America, good afternoon in various bits of Europe, good evening further east. So, a very warm welcome to you. What we are doing today is the second of two webinars we have offered so far through ENOHE in Covid times.

So just some bits and pieces before we start. Please mute your microphones and turn off your camera. We can do it for you but it will improve the quality of transmission for all of us if we have the minimum number of people visible and audible. You can use the chat function at any time. If you hover along the bottom of the screen you will find the chat icon. Click on that to open the chat function and use that to make comments or ask questions at any time. Technical questions - ask them on that as well.

So, just the legal bits. This is all general data protection regulations. We are recording this session and will be making it available as a podcast after the event. We are recording the discussion using the chat function but we won't be publishing that. So, if you participate in the chat, we will assume we have got your permission to record that, but we won't be publishing. Those are just the little housekeeping bits and pieces before we start properly. I'm going to hand over to our President, Josef, for the opening comments and then Josef will be handing back to me.

Opening Remarks

Dr. Josef Leidenfrost, MA

Austrian Student Ombudsman, President of ENOHE, Vienna, Austria

Thank you very much Jean. Welcome everybody. This is as Jean has said a second time event. A webinar since Covid19 forces us to use different means. We have 74 participants registered. A lot of them are already with us. We have four renowned speakers who will be introduced at the time when they appear. These 74 people registered are coming from 17 countries from four continents. From south east Australia, the west and north, actually Canada and United States, the south west and north, Mexico. But as Jean has said also several participants of course from Europe since our name at least is the European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education.

ENOHE. What is ENOHE? ENOHE is a network. By the time being an association providing a European-wide network, also open to other continents to support and exchange experiences and knowledge on the law and main principle of ombuds institutions in higher education, and to achieve our visions. We do have visions. ENOHE inter alia disseminates and promotes information through printed and electronic publications for its members but also for its non members. This is now a commercial! Please become a member if you are not yet! We hold physical and electronic meetings for our members and for people interested in the ombuds profession. From what I have seen from the list it's "ombuds professionals only". A very warm welcome actually to you all and I hope that you get a real benefit out of this event. It will be recorded and we will have a printed follow up publication that will be also made available via the web. We are very happy that we have you among us. Thank you.

Introduction

Jean Grier,
Head of
Investigations and
Student Casework,
The University of
Edinburgh UK –
and ENOHE Vice
President



Introduction

Jean Grier
University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Scotland

So, my name is Jean Grier and my day job is at the University of Edinburgh. That's my office on the photo there and I am missing it. I haven't been there since March 2020, and I suspect we are all in a similar position of being away from our proper desks for far too long.

Our first ENOHE webinar took place in June 2020. What we looked up then was the 'hot topics' that colleagues from four countries were facing in their work as ombuds, as we coped with what we know now was just the first wave of corona virus. (A podcast of this webinar is available at <http://www.enohe.net/2021/01/a-new-year-a-new-abnormal-adapting-to-covid-in-the-new-academic-year-enohe-webinar/>)

When we started planning our second webinar - I started planning in August – and with great confidence I referred to it as a 'coping with the new normal'. Adapting to the new normal – 'A new year, a new normal'. As we were planning for the new school year starting in September, I set the proposals for the webinar aside for a while - I got too busy with other things, as I am sure we all did. When I came back to it and dusted it off in October, I thought 'my goodness, how wrong we were'. There we were in August feeling quite optimistic about things - that we got this beast under control, we thought. People were certainly encouraging students to come back to campuses to start the new school year with a great deal of optimism, I feel. By October it had all gone in a very different direction. As we know now, we were just starting to see the beginning of the second wave. So, at that point when we looked at it again - and in quite a depressed frame of mind, I suppose - Josef jokingly referred to our situation as 'the new abnormal', and that's very much what we stuck with as the title for today's session. *A new year, a new [ab]normal: adapting to Covid -19 in the new academic year.*

FORMAT and CONTENT

- Four international speakers
- Five minutes each
- Three adaptations for ombuds work in-country
- ...and a bit of good news...
- Questions (using the typed 'chat' function)
- Concluding remarks

Format an Content

So, what we are going to do today is we've got four speakers from four different countries and they have done some fantastic slides - I'm delighted with this. I asked each of them to look at how they have had to adapt things, how things have adapted in their countries - very briefly - and what has come out to that. But I also asked them - and sometimes it's difficult to think of this - to think of a bit of 'good news' which has come out of this. Because some good news has come out of this - we've got changes of practice, and there are good examples of that from all of our speakers today.

Just to go over the ground rules again very briefly - If you haven't already done so, can you please mute yourself and close your camera, just to reduce feedback and let Zoom work as well as it can. I know some people have joined since I did the brief introduction, so, use the chat function at any time to ask questions or make comments. What we will do, once the four speakers have each done their short presentations, we'll have time for discussion. Jenna Brown will be keeping an eye on the chats as they come in and putting the questions to the speakers at the end. So, we hope to have a useful discussion. My expectation, having seen the slides, is that we will go away feeling not quite so alone. We are suffering very similar problems I think, around the world, on this - similar issues, whatever jurisdiction we work in. So I hope we can draw a bit of comfort from each other on that. The session is going to last not more than ninety minutes.

Four international speakers

- Panagiotis Kavouras, Greece
- Carolyn Brendon, Canada
- Degi L Csaba, Romania
- Felicity Mitchell, England & Wales

Four international speakers


So, without further ado I want to start introducing our speakers. We got **Panagiotis Kavouras** from Greece. He should have been hosting our Athens conference 2020 which of course was cancelled. **Carolyn Brendon** from Canada, from our sister organisation ACCUO there. **Csaba Degi L** from Romania. We are very pleased to have Csaba in as a newish member from a different jurisdiction. **Felicity Mitchell** doesn't live in two different places - she is based in England but has jurisdiction over complaints to universities in Wales as well. So, those are our four speakers and without further ado I'd like to hand over please to Panagiotis.

Panagiotis Kavouras
Technical University of Athens, Greece

Current practices



Learning by (not) doing . . .



Hear, see, do:
remote laboratory courses are more challenging – “hands-on” experience is not possible

Current practices

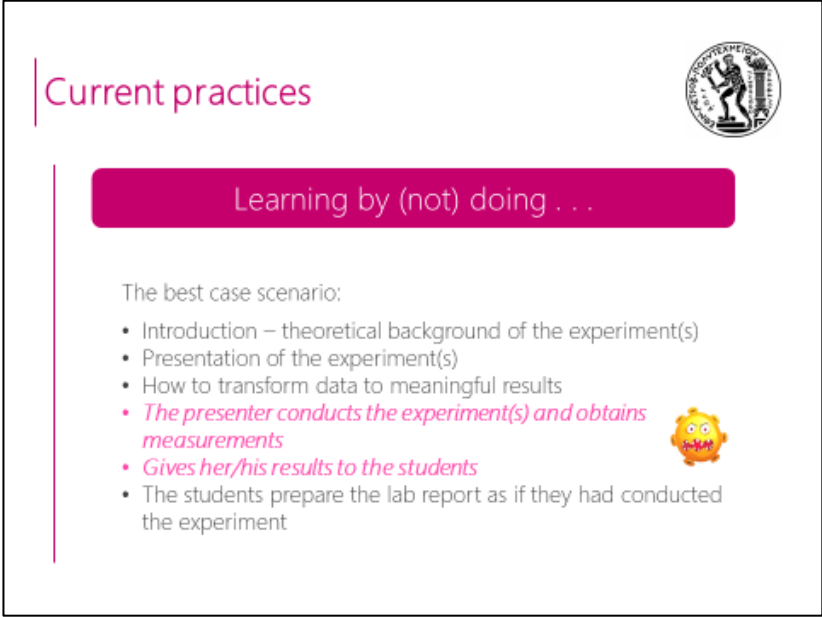
Learning by (not) doing . . .

Usually laboratory courses consist of:

- Introduction – theoretical background of the experiment(s)
- Presentation of the experiment(s)
- How to transform data into meaningful results
- Conduct the experiment(s)

The initial 3 stages can be somehow be replaced by online means – the 4th one? . . . No way!

Thank you very much Jean. In this time, I am very glad that I have the opportunity to present some things about how we are dealing with laboratory lessons right now in Greece. A small country but sometimes it is "the big unknown" at this matter. So, we are all facing challenges that are being posed by doing just theoretical lessons. Someone that has to deliver a lecture from his home or his office with his or her students speaks alone away from him or her students, sometimes with his or her monitor turned off, due to limited bandwidth. So, when you have to do laboratory lessons the challenges are even bigger because it's not only learning by hearing or listening or seeing. It is also learning by doing. So, what are the challenges and how universities in Greece have coped with this "learning by not doing".



Current practices

Learning by (not) doing ...

The best case scenario:

- Introduction – theoretical background of the experiment(s)
- Presentation of the experiment(s)
- How to transform data to meaningful results
- *The presenter conducts the experiment(s) and obtains measurements*
- *Gives her/his results to the students*
- The students prepare the lab report as if they had conducted the experiment

Since in this webinar there are a lot of people from humanity or also social sciences, I have made a brief introduction on what usually a laboratory course is comprised of. We don't have theoretical background of the experiments, because the student already has some knowledge of the theory. We present the experiments and the students are also presented the way they should transform data into meaningful results, meaning how they should apply the physical methods and how they should present their results, e.g. with a meaningful diagram. And of course, at the end they have to conduct the experiment. This last one that is missing right now is as we see the most important element that leads to a better knowledge in laboratory lesson.

These laboratory courses may have to be postponed for the next semester. Or the students have just been given some experimental results, in order for them to make the statistical analysis and present an essay of the laboratory course. According to my knowledge the best case is that the presenter of the laboratory course is actually conducting the experiment through live streaming or he records the experiment that can be retrieved for an upcoming lesson as a podcast element. In real time he obtains the results from the experiments and these results are been given to the students.

Bad news



- Doing an online laboratory course is didactically insufficient
- Students are being left with a sense of futility
- Grades can be based only on the lab report
- We cannot assess the ability of doing the experiment
- Grades cannot be comparable with regard to previous academic years
- Complaints from older students (assumption)



So, yes, beginning with the bad news. First, it is very-very clear that doing an online laboratory course is didactically insufficient. Meaning that if you do not actually conduct the experiment the student is impossible to have a real feeling on what he or she is doing. E.g. on the difficulties to contact the experiment etc. As a follow up the student is usually being left with a sense of futility. Meaning “why do I have this kind of silly experiment when it is not an experiment. It is just another theoretical lesson.” Also, the grades that the students will obtain will be based only on the lab report, on their essay on this experiment that they have not conducted. This means that the grades will be based not on the performance of the students in the actual experiment. Another thing is that these grades might not be comparable with the grades that the students of previous semester have obtained. And this might produce some complaints from students saying that are right now in this COVID-19 situation faculty members are a bit more lenient and grades might be a bit higher.

...And the good news is...



- **Laboratory courses seem to have been better organised with regard to educational material!**



But here are also some good news. It seems that laboratory courses right now have been better organised, with regard to educational material, exactly because these courses are being given remotely. So, in order to be better prepared, the experience must run perfectly because they have to make it... on time, because they are transmitted online or they have been filmed. So, in this aspect as we see it, we have this single good news, which is good news for the organisation of these laboratory sessions. So, thank you very much and I would hand over again to Jean.

Jean Grier

Panagiotis thank you so much. I don't very often receive a set of slides that makes me laugh out loud. But when I opened this the chap with the ginger hair reminds me so strongly of someone. I have been trying to remember ever since who that is but it's probably just as well that I can't remember. That I think is a very good introduction to the sort of things that we are dealing with today and when Panagiotis sent me this as one of the several good suggestions for topics, he might cover it resonated very strongly for me and I knew it would as well for a colleague from Scotland who has signed on today from a small institution. A small specialist institution where so much of the work they do is practical. It's not in the Sciences but it's practical and suddenly at my institution, and I know other institutions too, it's not just the physics and the chemists that are complaining about lack of laboratory courses. It's the artists complaining about studios, musicians complaining about practice rooms and it's the sports students doing things like sport science who are not getting the absence to facilities or to the group work that they would normally do. So really good there to see an adaptation has been put in place.

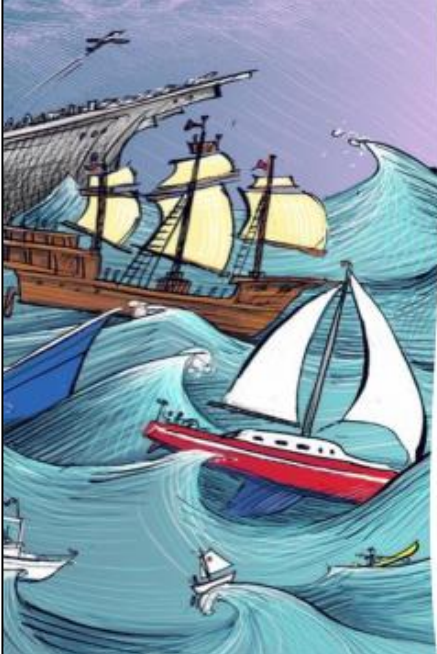
Question

Nothing is fascinating that you are saying that courses seem to be better organised. What's your take on that Panagiotis? Any particular reasons? Just the people are having to plan more carefully?

Panagiotis:

Yes, seems they deliver this in real time. When you have to deliver the laboratory course, as usually by physical presence, you do not actually do the experiment. We just show around the laboratory and try to help students. So, you just conduct some bits and pieces of the actual experiment. And when you have to conduct the whole thing, then it is like a choreography that must be done in a specific time. So, this is why people will be better organised in this aspect.

**Carolyn Brendon,
University Ombuds, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada**



Same Storm, Different Boats!

Some adaptations are creating challenges and inequities for students, particularly:

Resource Expectations

- Reliable internet connection, computer with camera and microphone, and a suitable place to work remotely.

Examinations and Testing

- Remote testing may involve the use of unfamiliar software programs.
- Reports of high incidences of cheating.
- Virtual proctoring tools are being used in some classes to monitor cheating.

Tuition

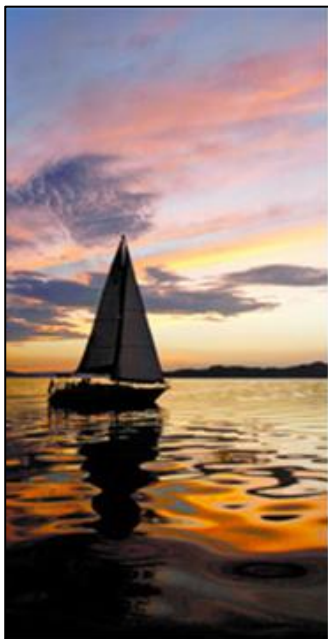
- Tuition has not decreased despite perception among students of poor educational experience, reduced extracurricular activities, and a lack of summer and part-time job opportunities to help fund their education.

The theme of this webinar is adaptations in the wake of the pandemic, so I looked at adaptations from the point of view of students. Last March, students were thrown into the online learning environment. Not surprisingly, on-line learning places additional resource expectations on students -- the constituency that has the least resources to begin with and so is least able to handle the additional burden. To succeed, students need a reliable internet connection and a well-functioning computer complete with camera and microphone. In the first months of the pandemic, there was a shortage of webcams -- a lot of students had trouble ordering them even from Amazon. Furthermore, students who had previously been able to find a quiet study space in the library or their residence, now needed to find a quiet place in their home. Some students live in a family home where there is a lot of activity; often more family members are working at home because of the pandemic. Moreover, these same students may have additional burdens such as increased care-giving or other family responsibilities. So, in addition to the already stress-inducing university expectations, students are now experiencing increased pressures and challenges.

On-line examinations and tests are one of the biggest university adaptations that has affected students. In some cases, in addition to mastering course material, students are expected to be competent in the coding requirements of the software program being used to record the answers. Furthermore, in some math tests and exams, students cannot show the steps they took to arrive at their answers and, therefore, do not have the opportunity to earn part-marks for their solutions; the risk of data-entry errors adds to their anxiety.

As many have observed, this on-line testing environment is coextensive with higher incidences of cheating being reported. There was a media report in Canada in which a hundred students from one course were found to have cheated. In response to the increased potential for cheating, universities have implemented a range of on-line proctoring tools which are downloaded onto the student's own computer. These programs, however, create all kinds of issues for students who, for privacy reasons, are not comfortable with being videotaped or having their computer interfered with. To avoid the use of on-line proctoring (and widespread cheating) some instructors have modified or eliminated exams altogether, but students complain that these changes result in unfairly difficult methods of assessment.

The third thing I looked at was tuition which actually doesn't fit under this theme because it isn't an *adaptation*, but student groups have been very vocal about their view that the university ought to reduce tuition. The argument from students is that there's not as much content being covered, the quality of instructions is poor, and there are not as many opportunities to participate in non-academic activities. And then of course students can't get jobs because of the pandemic so don't they have not enough money to pay for their tuition. In Canada, the government has instituted some programs to suspend interest on their student loans and create additional scholarships and bursaries and things like that. So, there has been some relief but overall, the tuition has remained the same. As people who work for the university, we may understand that the universities haven't saved money because of the pandemic. From the student point of view, however, tuition relief was an adaptation for which they were calling that didn't materialise, adding to their view that they are bearing a disproportionate burden of pandemic-related costs.



...And the good news is...

- Remote Dissertation Defences and Student Academic Misconduct and Appeal Hearings.
- Asynchronous content delivery and ability to close-caption.
- Intensification of Anti-Racism work.
- Increased awareness of and resources devoted to Student Mental Health.
- Greater sense of camaraderie among all campus units as we face a common threat.

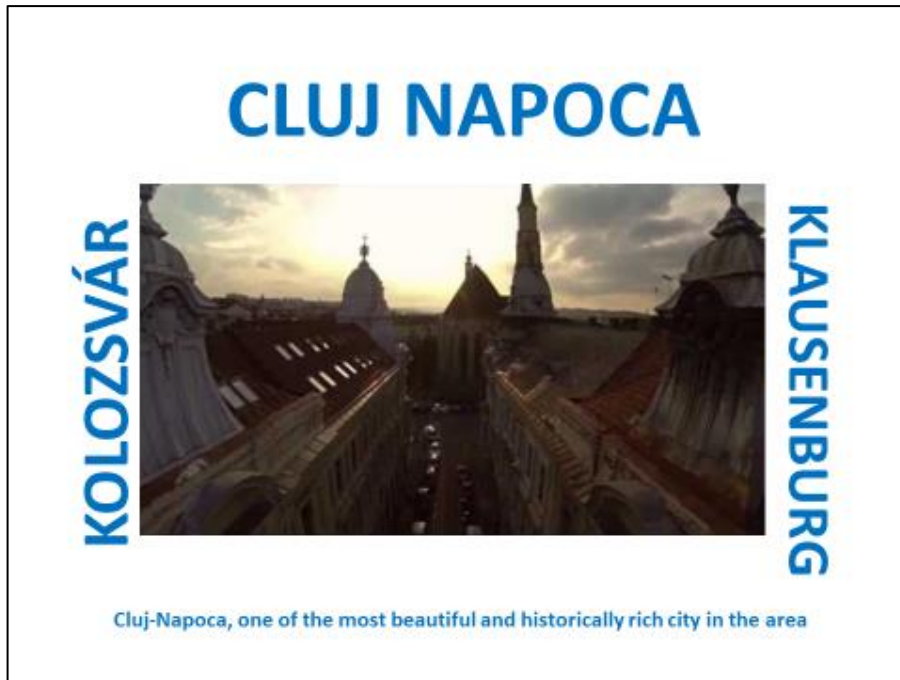
I also looked at the good news that has come from university adaptations. In the beginning of the pandemic, many universities offered pass or incomplete options for students if they didn't want to be graded in their courses. They also created a longer break between the Fall and Winter terms. While these adaptations are very short term, others may stay around after the pandemic which I think are positives overall. One of them is that we have moved to remote PhD dissertation defences. The feedback on that has been positive because I think that in some ways the remote environment can be a bit of a leveller and reduces student anxiety for these kinds of experiences.

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Also, it's easier for the university to get an external examiner remotely rather than having to fly them in and put them up in a hotel and arrange schedules and all these sorts of things. In addition, student academic misconduct and appeal hearings have also gone online. I have heard from students who have participated in these that they find them to be much less stressful than having to show up for a hearing.

The other changes that have come about as a result of remote learning. There are a lot of accessibility features built into remote learning such as options for closed captioning. Moreover, asynchronous content delivery provides greater flexibility for students who would otherwise have to ask for individualised accommodations or may not qualify for any accommodations, such as students whose first language is not English or who have to juggle other responsibilities.. One of the things we have noticed in Canada since the pandemic and perhaps is happening in other countries as well is that there has been an intensification of Anti-Racism work. So, for example in beginning of September across the country there was a two-day scholar strike where professors stopped work to protest the slow pace of progress on equity and inclusion work within universities. In addition, there has been an increased awareness of, and resources devoted to, student mental health and wellness. I think there has always been a sense among certain groups that student mental distress wasn't a very serious problem, but these views are changing; recently there has been more empathy towards students from some administrators and instructors. I think they realised that a lot of students are really struggling. And so, universities have devoted more resources towards counselling services and student supports. My final point is that there is a greater sense of camaraderie among all university constituencies, students included, as we face this common challenge of the pandemic. Thank you.

Dégi L. Csaba
Ombudsperson at the Babes - Bolyai University,
Cluj-Napoca, Romania



ETHICS COMMISSION | UNIVERSITY OMBUDSMAN

Any person, within and outside the university, can inform the University Ethics Commission of possible violations committed by members of the university community. All complaints received are treated in confidence by the Ethics Commission based on:

- ❑ **UBB CODE OF ETHICS**
- ❑ **GUIDE TO COMBATING UBB DISCRIMINATION**

From 2020, the University Ombudsman is an internal body of the BBU that operates on the principles of confidentiality, impartiality and independence, being an informal support for all members of the academic community, according to the BBU Code of Ethics and the Guide to Combating Discrimination in the BBU.

The UBB University Ombudsman subscribes to the UBB Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) and the standards of the European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education (ENOHE).

For filing ethics complaints: etica@ubbcluj.ro

For ombudsman: ombudsman@ubbcluj.ro

https://www.ubbcluj.ro/en/despre/organizare/comisia_de_etica#sesizare

Thank you so much, Jean! As you just have heard in the beginning I am and we are a newcomer. And actually, let me start by saying that the university ombuds is a pride of our University and it is pretty important and as you will see, it also has some connections with the COVID 19 situation. Let me start by saying that this kind of new abnormal brought to us something pretty normal. Because this is the first time in Romania to have university ombuds, at the Babeş-Bolyai University, the oldest university in Romania. We have roots from the Middle Ages. Well, this is the first time that we decided that we need an ombudsperson. Therefore, we hope that together with you and with ENOHE we are going to do a good job and we are going to give a good example for the higher educational institutions in our country. Thus, I think this is very good news for us. Actually, in 2020 we also have had elections.

We have a new president, a new rector, Prof. Dr. Daniel David. And, one of the issues I dealt with at the beginning of my work was related to the COVID 19 issues, because of the online teaching at most of our universities, and because work and administration are also hybrid remote. I think more data, more sensitive, and more personal data went out than we wanted to be out. And actually, we had issues with this. We had to nominate a GDPR officer for the university to work within a close collaboration. I just want to let you know how we are structured at the university because it is a new idea to have an ombudsperson here.

Therefore, we have an Ethics Committee and inside the ethics committee, we have the ombudsperson. Thus, this is one of the internal decisions that was made. And of course, we try to apply all standards, all ideas, and important principles. And, in 2020, to have a much more impactful job as an ombudsperson, the university was kind enough and agreed to have a Non-Discrimination Guide. Therefore, together with the Ethics Committee, with our Ethics Code, and with this guide to non-discrimination, we tried to do our best to cover all these sensitive issues that I am facing as an ombudsperson. Let me tell you the idea of the structure, that all formal issues are going to the Ethics Committee and all informal issues are going to the ombudsman. More here: https://www.ubbcluj.ro/ro/despre/organizare/comisia_de_etica.

COVID 19 NOW | UNIVERSITY | COMMUNITY

We recommend all members of our community to act accountably, as excessive worry and panic may render administrative activities under normal circumstances more difficult.

Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca now provides the community and authorities with four guides designed to provide information and possible approaches to the problems related to the COVID-19 pandemic, especially during the holidays and in the context of debates on the possibility of launching vaccination campaigns in the near future.

1. General Guide of public health recommendations adapted to the current conditions of the pandemic and psychological principles that facilitate their assimilation into individual behavior (including for vaccination), principles that can be used for other health recommendations aimed at cognitive-behavioral changes on a large scale, and three guidelines for emotional, cognitive and behavioral self-regulation in the pandemic, namely:
2. Guide to Psychological Self-regulation in a pandemic
3. Behavioral Regulation Guide - changing your life routine
4. Psychological Guide for the Winter Holidays in pandemic

<https://www.ubbcluj.ro/ro/infoubb/covid19/>

Let me say that my general impression talking to our colleagues and our students, I think generally speaking we did well enough with the COVID 19 challenge. We tried to focus on our students who have low resources. Thus, the students received instruments, I mean like tablets to join the online courses. Of course, we have had all these crazy decisions between Zoom and Microsoft Teams and all these issues. The university had very good internal and public communication on the issue of COVID 19. Therefore, I think our university did quite well, but the most amazing part of this great work was about communication. Because the idea was to act without panic as much as possible. As you can see, all our guides and protocols and all announcements, and all normatives that we had during the COVID 19 situation are published on our website. You can find here the link: <https://www.ubbcluj.ro/ro/infoubb/covid19/>. All our communication about COVID 19 and how do we adapt to it and what kind of steps are we talking, all of them is published in four languages. We have it in Romanian, Hungarian, German, and English.

Thus, we have this guide to Psychological Self-Regulation in a pandemic and we also have this Behavioural Regulation Guide which is based on CBT – cognitive behavioural therapy. Therefore, all of them are very useful in changing your thoughts, and your expectations, your feelings about this situation. And managing and building a new routine. We think it is essential for our public communication/website and everybody can access and that they are very practical indeed. We also prepared a Psychological Guide for the Winter Holidays that are coming and information how you do vaccination, which steps we are going to take. These were the most important things that I wanted to share with you at this moment. Thank you very much.

Jean Grier:

Thank you, Csaba. That has been excellent. Just one question from me if I may.

Question

How well do you find the students are observing your guides? We have a lot of cases present in the UK. And I mean the UK, not just Scotland, where there has been bad behaviour. Just put it that way. Bad behaviour by students not following government guidelines, not following university guidelines on things like social distancing, still having big parties, and guess what the COVID 19 rate increases. Are you finding this compliance generally?

Csaba Dégi L.:

This is a very interesting point. Cluj, the city where you know we have the university, is a melting pot. Thus, most of the students are coming from all other places. Because we switched to online teaching in early March 2019, which meant that most of the students were not able to afford to pay for high rents in the city. It is costly to stay here. And so, they went home. This was a kind of unexpected prevention for this kind of comeback issue. Otherwise, you know all other issues with isolation, with lack of communication, rise and we are trying to best to manage it with the involvement of the student representatives.

Felicity Mitchell
Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education, Reading,
United Kingdom



Thanks Jean. It's a great pleasure to be involved in such an exalted international event this afternoon. Thank you for inviting me. My perspective is a little bit different because the OIA, the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, is the national ombuds for higher education covering all the higher education providers (not just the universities) in England and Wales. We have a membership of around 800 higher education providers that have to be member of the OIA's Scheme. We cover around two million students in England and Wales. So, we see around two thousand complaints every year and that's going up and up. So, this year is going to be quite a bit higher than that. Students come to us after they have been through the internal processes of their universities.

So far, we have seen around two hundred and twenty complaints relating to the Coronavirus crisis. That's around a month of work for us year on year. The complaints have been about all the things we've been hearing about from colleagues this afternoon. I want to focus on how the universities are handling the complaints and how we are handling them too.

I have done two slides with good and bad news on each. And the first thing I wanted to highlight was the transition to home working. We have been very lucky. As an organisation we already had some home working. So, we were able to make that transition very smoothly and we were able to work uninterrupted throughout the lockdown periods. And in some respects our productivity even improved. We have soft phones so that we were able to carry on work pretty much the way we do normally, without people seeing a difference. We have good IT systems. And many of my colleagues and myself included have been quite happy not to have the commute to work. It's improved to work life balance a bit.

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But of course, not everyone has an ideal space to work at home. Just as the students have struggles, so have some staff in universities and so have our staff. And we're finding that the second lockdown we've had in recent weeks has been even harder for staff to adjust to. I suppose the novelty has worn off now and it is just hard.

We found that staff in some universities were really not well prepared to move to home working. They didn't have the equipment or the technical support available to them. And this meant that it was more difficult for students to access support internally and more difficult for us to get information from providers. In many cases we were chasing people round on mobile phone numbers because there was no other way of getting hold of them. And several times we were told that we couldn't have the information that we were asking for because it was on paper and they couldn't access the paper records because the university campus was closed. That's been an issue for us.

Another issue is that we've been trying to recruit because we have this rising tide of complaints and obviously recruitment has been harder during this period.

But on the plus side what we have noticed is a kinder approach, because of this sense that everybody is going through the same difficult period. And even just simple things like starting e-mails with "hope you are keeping well" or "hope you and your family are keeping safe" can change the tone in the correspondence, we have noticed. We have been more flexible with deadlines that we've set. Staff and universities are very grateful for that. So, a softer approach. Internally as well we've been finding new ways of keeping in touch. So, there are lots of Zoom meetings but we have some colleagues who find it hard working alone and actually do silent Zoom calls, so that they have their colleagues on a screen next to them working away without actually talking. They found that very reassuring.



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So, there has been a lot of publicity around students' complaints and student rights, and generally about what students are doing, over the last nine months. And this is putting a heightened focus on student rights. We have seen the National Union of Students being very active with campaigns. We have seen petitions signed by more than 350,000 students debated in parliament. There's have been a lot of interest in and concern about accommodation issues. Of course, in England and Wales the fees of £9,250 or so a year is a big issue for students.

This increased activity and publicity around these issues on one hand is very good but on the other hand the media does tend get the wrong end of the stick and there's quite a lot of confusion about what student rights actually are. So, many of the complaints that have been finding their way through to us have come to us too early because the students haven't complained to their own university first.

There has been a much higher level of interest in and appetite for the guidance that we put out. So, on our website [www.oiahe.org.uk] you can find briefing notes that we have published. We have just recently published some case summaries of the sort of cases we have seen. There has been a lot of interest in those and we have been working much more closely than usual with other regulators in the higher education sector and with the government as well, to try and make our approach to these complaints well known, so that students know where to go and what help they can get.

We've also been running online webinars and remote workshops. We found that during the initial lockdown period they were oversubscribed because people often weren't able to do very much else from home. So, they could log in to our webinars and workshops which is great because it means that we can talk through what we consider to be good practice and improve things in the sector that way. But all of this means that there has been a high demand on our resources.

So, it's great that we ran webinars, and our case summaries were in demand, and we're publishing briefing notes and so on. But this is quite a high level of demand on our staff members. And we recognised that the other side of that is obviously the people who are working at universities and other higher education providers are also under a great amount of pressure and stress. Just as the students who are trying to get through this period are as well. So, we are profoundly hopeful that 2020 will be a little bit easier on us all. That's my presentation. Thank you.

Jean Grier

Thank you everybody for your contributions I think this webinar is a good example of how we do support each other and that generosity there. Enormous generosity today from our speakers, but from all our participants as well in just sharing the commonality of the difficult times we are in.

So, thank you very much Panagiotis, Carolyn, Csaba and Felicity. And many thanks to Jenna as well of course for managing the questions at the end. Alberina and Stefan - Alberina has been driving the presentation - thank you. Stefan has been doing the technical stuff in the background which is very useful. So, a really useful session which I hope everybody has got something from, and I'm just going to hand over to Josef to do the formal closing. Thank you very much and stay safe.

Josef Leidenfrost:

Forty-eight people are still with us. So, I would say that it was quite successful, interesting, whatever. Jean, what you don't yet know is our next year's webinar (we will have two) in the spring will be called 'the new abnormal part 2', I would suggest. I also would like to thank all the speakers, all the participants while we were holding this webinar. Even Portugal, Rosa from the Universidad de Minho joined in. So, you see we are even liked a lot while we are already active. Having said that, we do hope, Panagiotis, that we will meet in Athens. We will all be vaccinated. We hope to get together physically in Athens probably too in the second half of the year. So, we take this as a kind of obligation to cater for you carefully and over the months to come because nobody really knows what is going to come. Thank you very much, especially to Jean who is the brain behind this kind of event. And as I said there will be podcast and there will be an occasional paper. Look out for it. If you want more of us, I mean of the association, join us and become a member. We will send you information on that also after the closure which I do right know. Have a very merry Christmas and have a better new year, that's all I can say - and stay healthy. All the best to where you all are. Bye bye. Thank you very much.

Curriculae Vitae

Carolyn Brendon,

University Ombuds, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada



Carolyn Brendon has been University Ombuds at McMaster University since 2003. Prior to that, she was Employee Ombudsperson and Harassment Advisor at Brock University. She holds a law degree from Osgoode Hall Law School, an M.A. from McMaster University, and an Honours B.A. from York University. She has several certifications including the FCO-Osgoode Certificate in Essentials for Ombuds; Adjudication for Administrative Boards, Agencies and Tribunals; Advanced Investigations and Human Rights: Theory and Practice.

Carolyn is a Member of the Board for the Forum of Canadian Ombudsman and serves on several committees of the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons.

Jenna Brown,

University Ombuds, University of Denver, Colorado, USA



Jenna Brown was the University Ombuds at the University of Denver, serving all sectors of this private American university from May 1999 to June 2020. A trained mediator, Jenna has designed, developed and directed innovative programs introducing and incorporating conflict management skills and dispute resolution services within organizations in the USA. Jenna has received training in negotiation, mediation, conflict resolution, and investigation in the USA and Europe. Jenna is a member of the International Ombudsman

Association and a contributor to the California Caucus of College and University Ombuds. She has been an ENOHE conference attendee and contributor since 2003.

Csaba Dégi L.

Ombudsperson at the Babes - Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania



Csaba L. Dégi is Associate Professor with habilitation and researcher at the Babes - Bolyai University, Faculty of Sociology and Social Work in Cluj Napoca, Romania. He is a licensed principal social worker with a private practice. He holds a bachelor's and a masters' degrees in social work and a PhD in medical psychology. He is Director at the International Psycho-Oncology Society (IPOS) and involved with the Association of Oncology Social Work (AOSW) from the USA. He was a member of the Committee for Social Work and Support in Oncology at the Romanian Ministry of Health and member of the Research Board of the National College of Social Workers from Romania. Since 2001, he has been working with cancer patients, professionals, and oncology institutions. Based on this experience he has developed the APSCO® research project – www.psychooncology.ro. APSCO - Assessment of Psycho-Social and Communication needs in Oncology – is the first multi-centre study on psychosocial aspects of cancer in Romania. He is the founder and president of the Romanian Association for Services and Communication in Oncology, an NGO affiliated with the Faculty of Sociology and Social Work of „Babeş-Bolyai” University.

Jean Grier,

University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom



is Head of Investigations and Student Casework at the University of Edinburgh. She has worked in higher education (primarily at the University of Edinburgh) for over three decades. In her current post – which was created in 2011 – Jean is responsible for overseeing the management of complaints to the University. Jean has many work-related interests beyond the ‘day job’ and is the author of several books including three on the history of the University. Active in her professional association, Association of University Administrators (AUA), Jean was awarded AUA’s Lifetime Achievement Award in 2018. Jean has always been conscious of the value of sharing knowledge and expertise across the sector and so was delighted to be elected Vice-President of ENOHE in 2019.

Panagiotis Kavouras

Technical University of Athens, Athens, Greece



Panagiotis Kavouras is a physicist by degree, with an MSc in Materials Science and Technology and a PhD in Physics focused on Technology of Materials. He is a senior researcher at the National Technical University of Athens. His main research interests are characterization of mechanical properties with indentation methods, development of metrological protocols for relevant experimental methodologies, and research on Research Integrity in Europe. Currently, he is working in one technical H2020-funded project three H2020-funded Science with and for Society projects. He is participating at the European Network of Research Integrity Offices (ENRIO), he is a member of the European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education (ENOHE), and the country correspondent for Greece for the SUPER-MoRRI project.

Josef Leidenfrost

Austrian Student Ombudsman, President of ENOHE, Vienna, Austria



joined the Austrian Ministry of Higher Education in 1988; he served as adviser to three ministers in the 1990s and early 2000s on such issues as academic internationalization, higher education, national and European scholarship programs, and students' rights and duties. Head of the Office of the Austrian Student Ombudsman since 2001, enshrined in law 2011. Josef started his professional career as a television journalist in the early 1980s, including in-depth research on Austrian contemporary history and publications on post-war relations. He was awarded a doctorate by the University of Vienna in 1986. In 2012 he completed his MA in mediation. Beginning in 2001 he played a pivotal role in setting up a complaint and acceptance management system for Austrian higher education institutions and a central agency for students' complaints at the Ministry. He is a co-founder of the European Network of Ombudsmen in Higher Education (ENOHE). He is the editor of ENOHE's occasional papers and of the ENOHE News newsletter.

Felicity Mitchell

Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education, Reading, United Kingdom



Felicity Mitchell was appointed as Independent Adjudicator on 1 April 2018. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) is the ombuds for students at higher education providers in England and Wales. Felicity has oversight of the OIA's good practice and case-handling work. Felicity was called to the Bar in 1992 and, after some years in private practice, moved to the ombuds sector, working at the Banking Ombudsman and the Financial Ombudsman Service. Felicity joined the OIA in 2004, and became a Deputy Adjudicator in 2009. She became a Director of the Ombudsman

Association in May 2019 and is a member of its Validation Committee. She was elected to the Board of the European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education in June 2019.

ENOHE Occasional Papers

The ENOHE Occasional Papers are a series of publications intended to inform its readers about current trends, recent developments, and scenarios for the future in the development of academic ombudsmen within European and international higher education.

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Webinar: A new year, a new [ab]normal: Adapting to Covid-19 in the new academic year
