

# INTENDED AND ACTUAL EFFECTS ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY DURING COVID-19 CLOSURES – CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY OF PUBLIC SERVICE

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## Keywords

Academic integrity, emergency remote teaching, online examinations, proctoring, regulations

## Abstract

Covid-19 has had serious consequences in all aspects of people's everyday life – including solving how to run Higher Education online. In the case of emergency distance education, the curriculum was not designed for an online platform (by-design), but due to the sudden disaster, education was changed to some form of distance education, but little or no change in methodology was possible due to the sudden change (Hodges et al., 2020). It is, therefore, a response to a need, which places a heavy workload on students, teachers, and administrative support - requiring constant communication and feedback to keep it functioning (Mohammed et al., 2020).

This paper introduces what internal policy changes have been induced with the Hungarian

government's regulation by introducing distance teaching and online examinations in academic integrity at the University of Public Service (UPS).

Using a case study methodology, this paper aims to investigate and demonstrate how the transition to online education and examinations has been carried out through internal regulation, what were the objectives, how focused it has been on academic integrity, how it has achieved its goals and how they affected students' habits. The use of a case study methodology is justified by the research question, the ability of researchers to intervene in events, and the time factor of the events under study (Yin, 2013).

## Background

In Hungary, the Government Decree 40/2020. (III. 11.) on the declaration of state of emergency – as a consequence of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) pandemic outbreak – affected the operation of higher education. Government Decree 41/2020 (III.11.) on the

measures to be taken during the state of danger, declared that - for the prevention of the human epidemic endangering life and property and causing massive disease outbreaks, for the elimination of its consequences, and for the protection of the health and lives of Hungarian

citizens - students were prohibited from entering higher education institutions.

Forced emergency responses significantly impacted the digital transformation of higher education. In the case of the transition to emergency remote teaching, there were no uniform (central) guidelines for institutions. Each institution tried to respond to the challenges by using and expanding the resources available following its internal regulations. Technically, University of Public Service strictly limited and controlled the available on-premise software application. The University switched from face-to-face education to remote teaching within ten days during the first closure in spring 2020. The rector declared the period between 12-22 March as an educational break to prepare for distance learning from 23 March 2020. The rector's measure did not allow the opportunity for synchronous online classes in the 2019/20 spring semester, so that semester was completed with online education, which meant pre-recorded lectures and online submitted assignments via Moodle or email. The end-of-semester knowledge assessments (exams) for all subjects were based on the evaluation of student's assignments (essays) prepared at

home (Koltay, 2020a). The use of text-matching software (plagiarism check) was not mandated and promoted; therefore, only a few lecturers used it voluntarily.

The academic year 2020/21 started with face-to-face teaching, but with special conditions and preparations for the transition to online teaching, which did not apply to online exams. In mid-November, new closures were announced, which meant another changeover to online education (Koltay, 2020b). In this case, the exams had already been held online, and Study and Examination Regulations were adjusted to this situation on 21<sup>th</sup> November and 23<sup>rd</sup> December (Nemzeti Közszoigálati Egyetem, 2020, Koltay, 2020c). The following two types of distance examinations were available: online oral examination or written examination using Moodle Quiz or assessment module. (NKE Járványügyi Operatív Törzs, 2020) The spring semester of 2021/22 was carried out online, including the exam period, with only minor changes to the regulations. (Koltay, 2021, NKE Járványügyi Operatív Törzs, 2021). The conference presentation will show this regulation in detail and its impact on academic integrity.

## Problem formulation

According to the COVID-19 pandemic, a formal assessment of the impact of the online examination policies and regulations on academic integrity was missing. Starting from the 2021/22 academic year, a new LMS has been

introduced at the university to improve the learning processes. The new LMS has expanded functionality and renewed design based on the experiences during the pandemic.

## Methods

A survey asked lecturers about their thoughts on the new system and their experience during the pandemic in the spring of 2022. Data collection was performed by voluntary online questionnaire. The questionnaire incorporated a set of questions on academic integrity.

The preliminary results of the lecturers' opinion suggest that a higher percentage of students used unauthorized/fraudulent resources during the online (distance) exams than in the attendance form before the pandemic. However, although fraud was detected in several cases, the clear evidence of what

happened was not available. Professors being committed to maintaining academic integrity have changed their methods to the context of their best. The goal was to ensure that students cannot cheat, or at least it was made difficult for them to do so. However, this was not always feasible due to the policies in place, including the missing option of using of proctoring tools.

## Conclusion

The pandemic has brought new challenges for everyone in everyday life and also in higher education. It has drawn attention to a broad variety of structural issues, which have been addressed and resolved in different ways throughout closures. By the time divergent

The students' semi-structured interviews with 50 in two groups and their general feedback suggest that they took advantage of the opportunities offered by the changed circumstances. While students did feel that this achievement resulted in a better grade, it could also harm their professional performance in the longer perspective.

regulations of the institutions and faculties were established, the closures were gone. Particular attention should be paid to the training of trainers on new digital technologies and challenges, as well as the formation of attitudes in the field of academic integrity.

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