



**DISTANCE LEARNING REGULATION OF
POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMMES OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF THESSALY**

(Approval of the Senate, meeting 304/1-3-2024)

Terms and conditions for organizing postgraduate programmes using synchronous and asynchronous distance learning methods as well as related issues by organizing the educational process with distance learning methods

1. The organization of the educational process of a postgraduate programme can also be carried out using synchronous distance learning methods. A necessary condition for the organization of a postgraduate programme by means of distance education is that the nature of the courses allows it and there should be a relevant justification during the establishment of the postgraduate programme.
2. Courses are taught in person and/or by means of distance education during the semesters, in accordance with what is specifically mentioned in the Regulations of each postgraduate programme.
3. The educational process may, by decision of the Department Assembly or SCP to be conducted using synchronous distance learning methods, even in postgraduate programme which have not included this possibility in their establishment decision, exclusively in the following cases:
 - In force majeure or extraordinary circumstances, where it is not possible to carry out the educational process or to use the infrastructure of the institution to carry out its educational, research and other activities,
 - organization of advanced courses and tutoring exercises, in addition to the mandatory hours of teaching work per course.

Regulation of specific issues:

- a) **Access issues in the integrated distance learning system, user accreditation process and access rights per user category (tutor, student, supervisor, technician and other staff).**

Access to both the synchronous and asynchronous distance learning system is done using the passwords (username, password) of the users' institutional accounts. Especially for the administrators of the systems, access can also be done with other types of special administrator accounts.

Based on the category of the user (tutor, student, supervisor, technician and other personnel) different rights may be assigned to the users.

- b) **Matters related to the technological infrastructures of HEI, technical support, maintenance and upgrading of the infrastructures and technologies to support the distance education process, as well as the obligations of each user.**

- i. The University of Thessaly for the organization of the postgraduate programme with distance learning methods has a ready-to-use integrated system of synchronous and asynchronous distance learning. For modern education, the Office 365 A1 for students/faculty application (leased system)

is available, while for asynchronous education, the eClass system installed on its own resources is available, which develops and maintains the GUnet Academic Internet. The two systems are distinct from each other, their combined use ensures a complete distance education system.

- ii. Especially the MS Teams application, which is part of the modern distance learning system, supports the organisation of teleconferences and the creation of virtual classes. It ensures visual and audio communication in real time using appropriate equipment (computers, cameras, microphones, speakers, headphones, high-speed networking) so that tutors and students can have voice and visual communication, while they are in different places. In addition, it supports the possibility of sharing applications and documents (application and document sharing), the possibility of using an electronic board, the possibility of accessing chat rooms both between tutor and student and between students for possible collaboration, exchange of views and preparation of joint tasks.
- iii. The distance learning system for asynchronous distance education eClass is a Learning Management System (LMS), which includes a Learning Content Management System (LCMS) application and provides development capabilities and writing lessons (authoring tool). In eClass it is possible to post educational material per lesson or other educational activity, which may include notes, presentations, exercises/activities with the corresponding feedback, indicative solutions thereof, as well as multimodal material (videotaped lectures, in compliance with the existing legislation on personal data protection), simulations, interactive educational material with the methodology of distance education, etc.). Educational materials of all kinds are provided exclusively for the educational use of students and are protected for any intellectual property rights in accordance with current legislation.
- iv. The integrated system environment of the University of Thessaly is in the Greek language. However, it is fully supported in the English language as well.
- v. The complete distance learning system is fully accessible to people with disabilities and people with special educational needs.

A description of the capabilities of two systems as well as their accessibility features can be found on their respective websites.

For each postgraduate programme that is organized by distance learning methods, by decision of its competent collective body, an Integrated Distance Learning System Manager is designated, and his details are communicated to the users of the system. Each designated person in charge has the knowledge to provide support and all assistance to students and tutors, as users of the integrated distance learning system.

The competent department of the University of Thessaly (Digital Governance Unit) takes care of the maintenance and upgrading of the infrastructure and technologies required for the operation of both the distance learning system and other necessary information systems to support the educational process.

The support of the Educational staff and students in matters related to the distance learning system is provided at the first level (Department) by the Head of Department and at the second level (Institution) by the Digital Governance Unit of the University of Thessaly.

The terms of use and the obligations of the users of the electronic services are described and communicated through their respective websites.

In the internal regulation of the postgraduate programmes, technological and any other requirements that must be met in order to participate in distance learning courses are determined. At a minimum, users should have their own modern equipment to be able to connect remotely to the e-learning system.

c) Educational support process for students

The support of the students of postgraduate programmes in educational matters is provided:

- i. From the academic advisers appointed by the Assembly of each Department, in general matters of the course of their studies, in accordance with what is defined in the Operating Regulations of each postgraduate programme.
- ii. by the tutors of the courses, on special topics related to the content of each course, through modern and asynchronous methods of communication that will be determined per course and per tutor,
- iii. from the Secretariat of the Department and the postgraduate programme in administrative and procedural matters,

d) Pedagogical framework for planning and implementing courses and other educational activities with distance learning methods and student evaluation.

For the documented organization of a distance learning course basic building blocks are required:

- i. Create an e-course in the LMS.
- ii. Provision of the basic information about the course, such as:
 - The course outline.
 - Calendar important dates and events.
 - Setting dates for meetings and communication between tutors and students.
 - A forum with news, announcements and a question and answers area about the lesson.
 - Bibliography and further study guide.

For each course unit, and depending on the needs of each course, the educational material may contain the following:

- **General information:** this includes, among others, the date of the lesson and the title of the subject unit.
- **Quick Study Guide:** Explains the learning content, provides an overview of the topic and individual thematic dimensions, focuses attention on points that may need special attention, provides a summary of the activities to be carried out in the session and acts as an organizer of the study. Also, the guide incorporates references to files of all kinds (PowerPoint, PDF) developed for the study of the thematic unit.
- **Instructions on this the use of Teleconferencing as synchronous or blended distance learning.** To connect the users, the link of the activity is listed, as well as the date and time of the video conference is announced.

- **Basic material study session.** Depending on the scientific field and topic, it can include different formats, such as PowerPoint, mp4 tutorial, and interactive multimedia educational content.
- **Parallel/Supplementary Texts:** The texts listed here are sources which extend refer to the Basic Study Text. Their study is optional and they aim at the additional study and updating of the issues dealt with in the main study text.

The educational activities, depending on the scientific field and the topic, can have different forms, such as: Quiz, Assignment, Public Dialogue Discussions (Forum). The evaluation of the students in the context of distance postgraduate programme is carried out with written or oral exams carried out live or with written or oral exams carried out by remote methods, as well as with alternative methods, such as submitting assignments, or conducting a practical test. With the postgraduate programme establishment decision the possible evaluation methods per educational activity are determined. If the evaluation is carried out by means of exams (in person or remotely), the University of Thessaly takes the appropriate and necessary measures to ensure the reliability and integrity of the process. In particular, the written or oral remote examination can be carried out through technological mediation and corresponding remote examination systems/applications, which ensures the authentication of the user, his physical identification and the supervision of the examination process, where this is deemed necessary. If special technological equipment is required for the evaluation process, this is announced in the annual announcement for the submission of applications of the candidates that want to be registered in the postgraduate programme.

During the remote examinations using modern and asynchronous electronic examination methods, personal data is processed in order to ensure the smoothness and integrity of the process. The methods include the use of the Office 365 A1 for students/faculty application (MS Teams, MS Forms) and the eClass platform, where the first of these offers the possibility of using a camera, for identification purposes, but also for monitoring and ensuring the integrity of the procedure in the context of conducting oral examinations. In addition, the e-Secretariat (student log) platform is exclusively used for the posting of grades, which ensures the personalized information of natural persons, while ensuring the confidentiality of the information. For plagiarism checking, the eClass-integrated Turnitin application is used.

In addition, the personal processing of data is carried out in the context of the purpose of dealing with technical problems and maintaining the desired level of security when connecting users to the applications and systems used to conduct the exams.

Access to the personal data of the natural persons involved is given to the competent professors and the absolutely necessary and authorized, for the achievement of the above purpose of processing, University staff who have been informed about the way they should manage the specific data. In addition, the recipients of the data are the cooperating companies-providers of the supporting systems (Microsoft Corp, Turnitin LLC) used in the context of remote examinations, which operate on behalf of the University, having the role of processor. The processing of personal data by the executors is carried out under the express orders of the University and under the guarantee of taking all appropriate technical and organizational measures for data

protection. The University of Thessaly takes the appropriate technical and organizational measures that ensure the integrity and confidentiality of the data, and the observance of proportionality and the principle of data minimization when processing them.

Indicatively, it is stated that:

- In view of the remote examination process using modern and asynchronous methods during the period of the coronavirus pandemic, the University carried out an Impact Assessment Study of processing, in compliance with the legislative requirements of Regulation (EU) 2016/ 679 of the European Parliament for the protection of the personal data of natural persons. Based on the conclusions of the Study, which assessed the potential risks of said processing for the rights and freedoms of natural persons, UTH issued clear instructions to all those involved in the process, regarding the correct use of the systems and tools that will be used. In cases where it was deemed necessary, the University updates the Impact Assessment Study.
- Access to the systems for conducting remote examinations is carried out through the institutional personal login details for all users (secure access).
- Secure communication protocols with applications are in use.
- Necessary updates and upgrades are made of computing infrastructures.
- The infrastructure event logs are kept for a sufficient period of time.

When using the systems and applications used in the context of the exam, their functionality for recording audio and video data has been blocked, as far as possible, in order to ensure the protection of the personal data of the participants in the process. In addition, it is expressly forbidden to use the same means to video and record the examination process by the participants. Apart from recording in any way, it is forbidden to publish or post on websites or share with third parties, or transmit or distribute in any way the whole or part of the distance exam. Violation of the above prohibition will entail the necessary legal actions on the part of the University.

e) Procedure for evaluating and upgrading the digital skills of the teaching staff participating in distance postgraduate programme.

All the teaching staff who participate in remote postgraduate programmes is evaluated for their work and the quality of teaching through the course evaluation process, which is carried out in the context of the procedures supported by the MO.DI.P. of the University of Thessaly.

At the same time, tutors are encouraged to participate in seminars and training programs of the Teaching and Learning Support Center of UTH {<https://ctl.uth.gr>} to upgrade their digital skills and be aware of the latest developments in the field of technology and communications.

f) Procedure for plagiarism prevention through trusted apps.

The University of Thessaly, paying particular attention to the importance of academic ethics, has a subscription to the internationally recognized Turnitin plagiarism prevention software which has been integrated into the e-Class platform, enabling the tutor of each course to check-detect whether the assignments uploaded by the students are the product of their own their work or copy product.

g) Personal data protection policy and compliance with the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation and Law 4624/2019.

The University of Thessaly recognizes the importance of the protection of the personal data of natural persons and their lawful and correct processing. In this context, the University complies with the basic principles of personal data processing, respects the rights of natural persons and ensures that the personal data in its possession:

- are collected for specified, explicit and legal purposes, as reflected in the File of Processing Activities it maintains and which are collected after the consent of the natural person where required,
- are processed only for the purposes for which they were collected and/or for legal and regulatory reasons and/or for the defense of the public interest,
- are not further processed beyond the specified purpose,
- are appropriate, relevant and limited to the minimum necessary for processing purposes,
- are subject to lawful processing in accordance with the rights of natural persons, are accurate and updated, when required and especially before making critical decisions for natural persons;
- are not kept for a longer period of time than is required for the purpose of the processing and/or for the University's compliance with legal and regulatory obligations,
- are kept secure from unauthorized access, loss or destruction,
- are passed on to third parties only under the condition that an adequate level of their protection is ensured. The above is observed by all the employees of the University (e.g. administrative, teaching staff), as well as by third parties who carry out personal data processing operations.
- persons on his behalf.

The University to ensure the above:

- monitors and controls the implementation of the policy, as well as the evaluation of its effectiveness in terms of compliance with the regulatory framework and best practices for the protection of personal data,
- implements procedures for complete satisfaction of the rights of natural persons,
- Postgraduate programmes inform clearly the natural persons regarding the processing of their data,
- integrates personal data management requirements into all functions and inter-gases related to their processing,
- has recognized all internal and external involved parties and their requirements regarding the protection of personal data,
- has defined roles and responsibilities related to data management,
- provides clear instructions to the staff and the third parties who perform tasks on their behalf for the safe use and transmission of the data,
- ensures that the transmission of data to third parties and the processing by them on its behalf is carried out in compliance with the regulatory framework for data protection as well as this policy,

- designs, adopts and monitors the implementation of a system of indicators and objectives for the safe and legal data management,
- invests in the continuous training, awareness-raising and training of its employees in matters of personal data protection as well as in the continuous improvement of know-how and its dissemination to all staff,
- has all the required resources for the effective implementation of the Personal Data Protection Policies and Procedures
- has designated a Data Protection Officer (DPO)
- communicates this policy to all personnel and ensures its continuous upgrading, in order to achieve full compliance with the applicable regulatory framework.

The University is committed to the continuous monitoring and observance of the regulatory and legislative framework and to the continuous implementation and improvement of the effectiveness of the Policies and Procedures adopted for the protection of personal data.

h) Information systems security policy targeting the field of e-learning systems development.

The University of Thessaly recognizes the necessity of safeguarding the information assets that are in its possession or under its control as well as the obligation to comply with the Greek and European legal and regulatory framework.

The Security Policy (SP) is the framework for the protection of data managed by the university, providing guidance to the Organization in relation to the way information is organized and processed. The Security Policy consists of a set of rules that determine how the university manages and protects its Information Assets. These rules define the role of each person involved in the university, their responsibilities, responsibilities and duties.

The purpose of the Security Policy is the SAFE, RELIABLE AND UNINTERRUPTED provision of services by the e-learning system.

The purpose of the Security Policy is the establishment of a framework of general instructions for the protection of university information, the implementation of which ensures an acceptable level of Security for the Organization in relation to its risk profile. In addition, the goal of the SP is to set restrictions on access and use

of computers, information systems, networks, means of electronic communication and other related information media used to store and process data, documents and software that the university owns and uses with the ultimate purpose of ensuring the availability, integrity and confidentiality of information and information goods during the operation of the e-learning system.

The Primary Objectives of the Security Policy are also:

- Ensuring the confidentiality, availability, and integrity of the information managed by the university and non-disclaimer.
- Ensuring the rights of natural persons who receive services from the information system as well as its employees and partners.
- The early detection of Information Security risks and their effective treatment.
- The immediate response to Security Information incidents.

- Ensuring the smooth operation of information resources.
- The continuous improvement of the level of Information Security.
- The satisfaction of regulatory and legislative requirements.
- Increasing staff and student awareness of risks that threaten information Security and continuous information on the best practices that must be followed to minimize the likelihood of their occurrence.

To achieve the above objectives, the University implements policies and procedures at frames whose:

- The organizational structures that are necessary are defined for monitoring issues related to Information Security.
- The technical control and limitation measures are defined of access to information and information systems.
- The way of classifying the information according to its importance and value are determined.
- The necessary information protection actions during the stages of processing, storage and handling are described
- The methods of information and training of the users of the information system in matters of Information Security are identified.
- Methods of dealing with Information Security incidents are determined.
- The ways in which the safe continuity of operation of the information system is ensured in cases of malfunction or in cases of disasters.
- Ways to improve system security and comply with legal and regulatory requirements are identified

For this reason, the University takes the necessary measures at a technical and organizational level in order to ensure the integrity, availability and confidentiality of the information processed by the e-learning system:

Organizational measures

- Security incidents are managed by a three-member team consisting of the head of the unit, a member of the Engineering Department and the technical manager of the unit. The group can be enriched with other members if necessary.
- Access rights to the e-learning system and its information are determined by the role of each user, so that they are only those absolutely necessary for the needs of their role.
- The terms of use and the obligations of the users of the electronic services are described and communicated through their respective websites.
- Introductory training of the users of the e-learning system is carried out.
- Actions are taken and staff are committed in advance to maintain the confidentiality and privacy of data and procedures
- Regular checks are carried out for system security.
- Security measures may be modified and this policy, depending on the current requirements, of audit reports and system users.
- Alternative means of communication are identified.

Technical measures

- The access control mechanism, the assignment of roles and rights in the system is carried out and determined by the Institutional account.
- Regular security copies are made of both the data received by the system and the asynchronous training system itself, so that it is easy and quick to restore.
- Communication with the system is carried out exclusively and only with secure communication protocols that encrypt the communication channel for data transmission.

i) Information privacy management policy and cyber security.

The information privacy management policy and the cyber security of the eClass and MS-Teams subsystems used to conduct the distance postgraduate programmes refer to the following links:

{https://eclass.uth.gr/info/privacy_policy.php}

{<https://privacy.microsoft.com/el-gr/privacystatement>}

j) Criteria for periodic internal evaluation of distance learning Postgraduate Programs

According to Law 4957/2022, as amended and in force, the evaluation of the Postgraduate Programs of the Department has been institutionalized in the context of the periodic evaluation / accreditation of the academic unit by the National Authority of Higher Education.

The points that are evaluated in distance learning programs are linked to what is written in this regulation, and which regulate distance education at the University of Thessaly.

k) Student registration procedure in the Student Register of HEI

Students who are accepted according to the selection procedures of the postgraduate programmes are registered by the Department Secretariat in the Student Registry (Electronic Secretariat) of the University of Thessaly and are granted by the competent service (Digital Governance Unit) an institutional account to access the electronic services.

l) Any other matter related to the organization of postgraduate programmes with distance learning methods.

For the establishment of postgraduate programmes organized by distance learning methods, the procedure of Article 80 of Law 4957/2022 and Article 5 of joint ministerial decision under items 18137/Z1 (B'1079/2023) is followed or as applicable from time to time.

The decision to establish postgraduate programmes which is organized by distance education methods, is accompanied by a report containing:

- i. Evidence of the suitability subject matter of the postgraduate programmes to be organized by distance learning methods.
- ii. Analysis of the proposed methods of organizing the educational process, such as through life, synchronous, asynchronous, and blended learning, per educational activity of the study program and distribution of teaching hours for each educational activity of the postgraduate programmes per method of implementation, as well as the percentage of any asynchronous distance education per educational activity and overall in the program. If the educational process is carried out using asynchronous distance learning methods, they cannot exceed twenty-five percent (25%) of the credits of the postgraduate programmes.
- iii. Documentation regarding the infrastructure of the Institution and especially the suitability and adequacy of the digital infrastructure.
- iv. Documentation on the digital skills and expertise of teaching staff in the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).
- v. The digital educational material.
- vi. The methods of digital assessment of students and the digital assessment material.

Any other specialized topic that may be applicable in specific post-graduate study programs of the Institution, which are carried out entirely or partially remotely, may be regulated and settled by the Internal Regulations of the postgraduate programme and the decisions of the S.C. of the postgraduate programme, provided that these arrangements do not conflict with the regulations of the Institution and the current legislation.