

Dear All,

For the second consecutive year I am addressing the university community of the URL on the occasion of the start of the new academic year, still conditioned by the Covid-19 pandemic. Just a year ago I shared with all of you that if there was a word on everyone's lips it was the word "uncertainty". Uncertainty about the evolution of the pandemic, uncertainty about the level of attendance in our classrooms, uncertainty about the evolution of international mobility, uncertainty about how to develop the academic year as a whole. I also stated that we had prepared intensely "to implement a mixed teaching-learning model that, in compliance with the necessary health measures, combines the maximum authorized physical presence with a virtual one that looks as similar as possible to the ordinary experience we live in our classrooms". I also added: "We are prepared to regain full physical presence as soon as possible, and we are also prepared to intensify virtuality if the evolution of the pandemic requires so."

Unfortunately, the evolution of the pandemic led the health authorities of the Government of Catalonia to decree strong restrictions from mid-October 2020 and on-campus activities were reduced to a minimum. The second of the scenarios, which no one wanted, the "intensification of virtuality" was again a reality that we had to maintain until almost the end of the course. I could also talk about the impact on internships, on final degree or master's theses, or on research activity as a whole. So, if one course has been the Covid-19 course, this has been the 2020-21 academic course.

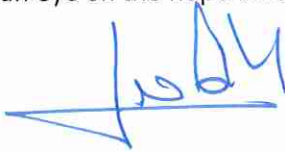
A year later, the expression we repeat most now is that this must be the course of recovery. It must be the course where we go back to normality; a normality that will necessarily be renewed from the learnings and transformations of our experience. We need to regain full presence in universities, especially in those that are, and want to be, on-campus universities. The advanced state of the vaccination campaign, at least locally and in Europe, fills us with hope, although it makes us suffer and saddens the situation in other parts of the world. And that is why we must insist on the call to responsibility of each and every one of us. In a situation like the one we live in, the possibility of getting vaccinated must be interpreted as an obligation, simply out of social responsibility. And I'm not just talking about helping to lay the groundwork for regaining full presence in university education, I'm talking about helping to stop the progression of this pandemic globally. We also have, at the level of Catalonia, the political commitment of the Government of the Generalitat to move towards full presence in universities as soon as possible, which we are obviously grateful for.

Based on the experience of last year, we started the teaching activities with a set of restrictions that force us to limit the capacity of our facilities. Again, although to a lesser extent, we need to resort to the same mixed teaching-learning model as last year. Virtualization currently has a small weight, and affects each faculty in different proportions, or even affects differently depending on the course or program within the same centre. Once again, I would like to express my appreciation, admiration and gratitude to all those who make it possible for the University to continue to carry out its missions despite the exceptional circumstances. Both the students, the teaching and research staff, and the administration and services staff have managed to carry out the day-to-day running of our institution with enormous commitment, great effort and a high capacity for adaptation. Thank you very much to all of you!

I can't finish these lines without making a special mention of the students who started their undergraduate studies last year. You had to make the transition to university studies absolutely conditioned by the pandemic and your first year in university has been much more virtual than on-campus. Do not doubt at any time that each faculty has made every effort to be able to prioritize your adaptation to the university world, trying to minimize the impact that this situation may have on your education. We fully hope that this course will be very different, and we are also convinced that the experience you have had will have made a positive contribution to your training.

I also want to address a few special words to those of you who are now joining the university world. The situation today is very different from that twelve months ago, but we are not yet in a normal situation. You are entering the university in special circumstances, but have no doubt that one of our priorities remains to make this entry into the university world -that will surely prepare you for the future- as easy as possible. We are and wish to be faithful to the motto of our university: "Being and knowing!". Welcome!

With an eye on the hope of recovery, I wish you a good 2021-22 academic year!



Dr. Josep Maria Garrell i Guiu  
Rector

Barcelona, 27th September 2021