

Distance learning regulation

Organization of the Educational Process with Distance Learning Methods (for the Master's Degrees that are conducted fully or partially through distance learning using Information and Communication Technologies, Government Gazette 1079/Issue B/28-2-2023)

1. Readiness of the Master's Degree of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki for the use of an integrated distance learning system

A comprehensive distance learning system for synchronous and asynchronous support of participants operates at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in order to support the organization of the educational process with both synchronous and asynchronous methods of education. In particular, the integrated distance learning system covers the use of video conferencing and virtual electronic classroom technologies so that the teacher and students who are in different locations receive immediate feedback at the same time and the ability to access chat rooms both between the teacher and the student and between students for any collaboration, exchange of views and preparation of joint assignments.

2. Access, accreditation and user rights of the Master of Science in the integrated distance learning system

The environment of the integrated distance learning system is in Greek and English.

The integrated distance learning system is fully accessible to people with disabilities and people with special educational needs.

The A.U.T. provides institutional account, identification and authentication services (Single Sign On SSO) for easy access to all academic resources and applications based on the user category (teacher, student, service administrator, etc.). For each P.M.S. organized with distance learning methods, by decision of the competent collective body of the P.M.S., one (1) natural person is designated as the Manager of the integrated distance learning system, who has the required expertise to support the teachers and students of the P.M.S. during the use of the distance learning system. The details of the Manager for each P.M.S. are communicated to the users of the integrated distance learning system. Additional access rights are given specifically to the P.M.S. support technicians upon request.

The initial identity check of applicants for the issuance of the institutional account is carried out during the application submission phase, following a procedure defined by the Secretariats of the Master's Degree Programs. The Digital Governance Unit of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (under institutionalization according to Law 4957/2022) utilizes Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and the support of the Managers of the Integrated Distance Learning System of the Master's Degree Programs.

3. Technological infrastructure and services

The integrated distance learning system for distance education supports horizontal services/infrastructures of the Institution that can be utilized for the synchronous, asynchronous or blended educational process and are the following:

- Service/Infrastructure 1: Integrated e-learning management system (<https://elearning.auth.gr/>, <https://elearning.auth.gr/guides-site/guides-teachers.php>) (LMS), which is implemented by the open source software Moodle and allows the creation and hosting of a virtual classroom.
- Service/Infrastructure 2: Provision of a modern distance learning environment for the interaction

of participants in real time, which allows for the conduct of remote lectures for the needs of the courses using tools such as “Zoom”, “MS”, “Teams”, “Google Meet”, “BigBlueButton”, (<https://it.auth.gr/services/academicsupport/>).

- Service/Infrastructure 3: Rooms with appropriate audiovisual equipment to host a remote P.M.S., which will be conducted either fully remotely or in a hybrid format.
- Service/Infrastructure 4: Creation and hosting of a website for each P.M.S. using the service <https://websites.auth.gr/>.
- Service/Infrastructure 5: Technological support for the creation of multimedia material (podcasts, videocasts) synchronized with the speaker's presentation in the courses offered, among others, through the educational material production infrastructure of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (<https://it.auth.gr/service/studio/>).
- Service/Infrastructure 6: Support for live broadcasting and videotaping (streaming/recording) of courses (<https://it.auth.gr/service/streaming/>).
- Service/Infrastructure 7: Electronic secretariat service for the management of applicants/students, teachers/subjects and courses (<https://sis.auth.gr/>) (SIS).
- Service/Infrastructure 8: Institutional account and SSO services for easy access to all academic resources and applications.
- Service/Infrastructure 9: Integrated Library system, which is based on the open source software Koha, as well as on the public catalog of books and electronic resources and subscriptions of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (<https://search.lib.auth.gr>).
- Service/Infrastructure 10: Institutional Repository of Scientific Papers (IKEE) of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (<https://ikee.lib.auth.gr>)
- Service/Infrastructure 11: Service for the provision of digitized material of historical and cultural interest (<https://digital.lib.auth.gr>) and archival collections (<https://archives.lib.auth.gr>).
- Service/Infrastructure 12: Plagiarism detection and control service through the commercial program “TurnItIn”.
- Service/Infrastructure 13: Service for training users in search techniques in bibliographic sources, in finding and compiling bibliography and in good practices regarding the management of copyrights while avoiding plagiarism.
- Service/Infrastructure 14: Support services for people with disabilities <https://www.lib.auth.gr/el/amea>. The maintenance and upgrading of horizontal services/infrastructures 1-14 is carried out centrally by the Foundation. The support technicians of the Department where the M.A.S. is implemented. support the teachers, who, at a second level, are supported by the central services of the Foundation in the context of the dissemination of know-how and good practices.

3.1. eLearning educational support service

Specifically, the horizontal eLearning educational support service has the following characteristics:

It provides the possibility of digital organization and distribution of the educational material of the courses and offers communication tools between those involved in the educational process (students and teachers), facilitating the smooth and uninterrupted conduct of the course.

Additionally, the horizontal service <https://elearning.auth.gr/>:

- offers an interface with modern distance learning tools
- manages all required roles and the corresponding access rights
- is part of the general framework of technical support, maintenance and upgrade of the central digital services of the Institution
- offers tools for checking work for possible plagiarism
- offers tools for the development of educational material accessible to people with disabilities
- complies with the policies of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki for data protection

- is hosted in the central computing infrastructures of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki that are certified according to ISO 27001:2013 for the Information Security Management System that follows
- is interconnected with the electronic secretariat service of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (<https://sis.auth.gr/>), which manages registration issues in the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki student registry. It is noted that through the electronic secretariat service, standard certificates are offered in Greek and English, in order to serve the international profile of the Foundation in the best possible way and by adopting effective procedures.

The internal regulations refer to the electronic platform chosen to be used (e.g. elearning.auth.gr). In case it is decided to use another platform, it should cover corresponding issues (such as maintenance, upgrading and infrastructure support).

4. Procedures for educational support

Given that the main reasons for abandoning distance learning include the isolation of learners, the lack of overall supervision of the material, time management and the inability to estimate the workload per unit of the material, most distance learning programmes develop navigation tools for the material, such as study guides or study guides and study schedules. A basic prerequisite for the most effective educational support of students is the formulation of instructions for navigating the programme, the course and for managing the students' study time.

In the study guides or study guides, the content of the courses is briefly analyzed, the key points of interconnection of the individual sections of the material are noted and, more generally, a complete navigation of the educational material to be studied and the evaluation methods are provided. In particular, in each M.A.S. clear information is provided, available through the electronic secretariat service (SIS) and/or the integrated electronic course management system (LMS), which refers to the following topics:

- Course summary
- Purpose and learning objectives (overall or per teaching unit)
- Course structure and contents (e.g. number of units, number of chapters, etc., accompanied by an indicative study load).
- Course calendar with emphasis on important dates (e.g. meetings through synchronous or asynchronous distance learning, submission of assignments, exams, etc.).
- Grading scale and evaluation rules
- Evaluation forms. Examples include the selection or combination of assignments (individual or group), written or oral exams (in person or remotely), interviews (in person or remotely), overall participation (e.g. participation in course forums), formative or final assessment.
- Grading weight of each form of assessment (e.g. 30% assignment, 15% overall participation, etc.)
- Educational material and possible additional learning resources (accompanied by an indicative study load)
- Definition of a modern distance learning system (such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, etc.) and access method (via institutional account)
- Methods of feedback and evaluation of the course
- Related bibliography

The study schedule of a course analyzes the indicative study load of a unit of material (for example, a chapter) per unit of time (usually per week) and, if deemed necessary, recapitulative time milestones are determined. More generally, these two guides are essential to accompany each course of the Master of Science (MSc). and be reviewed at regular intervals based on the results of the internal and external evaluation of the program, as well as current developments in the field of the relevant subject.

5. Pedagogical framework for planning and implementing educational activities using distance learning methods and student assessment

The pedagogical framework for planning and implementing distance learning activities of the Master of Science (MSc) using distance learning methods can function as a framework of basic principles on which the

detailed design of each program can be based. The framework for planning programs must be general, so that academic freedom and autonomy are not limited during program design, but on the contrary, are facilitated and expanded.

The design follows two longitudinal parameters. The first parameter concerns the requirements that the subject matter of the specific program introduces in each case and the second the evaluation, as it is carried out in the program based on the specifications of the Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS) of the MO.DI.P. Based on the above framework, it is possible to have, on the one hand, a unified policy for the distance learning postgraduate programs of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and, on the other hand, adaptation and configuration based on the specific requirements of each program.

Further identifying the basic components of the scheme with regard to the requirements of the cognitive subject, the following are noted:

A. In the pedagogical framework, pedagogical philosophy is linked to perceptions of the nature of knowledge, learning processes, and the way to approach learners. Pedagogical approaches refer to specific choices (e.g., inquiry-based learning, collaborative knowledge construction) but also to the way in which students participate in the study, reading, watching, or listening to static or dynamic online content. Pedagogical strategies are mainly associated with the selection of specific educational methods and techniques, and pedagogical tactics with the selection of methods for the activities and tasks of the learners. The content can be any form of electronic source (e.g. articles, ebooks), or digital multimedia material (e.g. videos, audio files, virtual learning environments) posted or collected from the internet on the electronic platform, artificial intelligence platforms, etc.

B. In the educational context, tasks are differentiated from the activity of the students, as the task refers to the content of the assignment by the teacher, while the activity of the students constitutes the product of the transformation based on their cognitive and interpretive tools, so that they ultimately yield the learning outcomes. The environment is the type of program being planned (e.g., postgraduate) and the implementing body in this case is the university. The educational medium can be online interaction activities, scenarios for resolution, discussion forums, simulation games, interactive educational games, interactive educational scenarios that require processing and decision-making, or problem solving. This material is constantly evaluated and updated.

When designing a P.M.S., an analytical reference to the components of the above proposed framework is not necessary. This framework is simply the theoretical background on which the design of a P.M.S. can be most effectively done, while the principles mentioned (e.g., student-centered learning, collaborative investigative activities, active participation of students, development of specific skills) describe the educational direction of the P.M.S. of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

Identifying the basic components of the educational scheme with regard to evaluation, the following are noted: The decision to establish the P.M.S. determines the possible methods of monitoring, examination and evaluation per educational activity.

It is noted that:

A. Depending on the type of program and its specific conditions, the mandatory use of a camera is established by all participants during the modern part of the teaching and during the evaluation in order not only to make it possible to ascertain their presence, but mainly to establish and strengthen the social presence and to ensure the unhindered communication of those participating, elements that are basic components of an effective distance education.

B. The evaluation of students in the context of the distance P.M.S. can be carried out through written or oral examinations, either in person or by distance methods. In addition, it is possible to use alternative/supplementary forms of assessment, such as submitting assignments or conducting practical tests. It is recommended to avoid high-stakes final exams and suggest formative assessment. At the same time, it is necessary for teachers to encourage interaction throughout the semester through assignments.

6. Process for evaluating and upgrading the digital skills of teaching staff

The digital skills of teachers can be improved through the guides of all the offered Information and

Communication Technologies tools of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and the training material (with self-assessment capabilities) available from the Center for Electronic Governance (KID) and the Center for Teaching and Learning Support (KEDIMA) of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. In addition, systematic and specific training programs can be provided for the further upgrading and improvement of these skills. The criteria for periodic internal evaluation, as well as the corresponding evaluation tools for teaching staff and the program, are formulated on an annual basis by the MO.DI.P. of the A.U.T.H., so that, on the one hand, they are compatible with the Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS) and on the other hand, they meet the requirements of the National Authority for Higher Education (E.U.H.A.E.) and the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

7. Plagiarism control procedure

The e-learning.auth e-course service (Service/Infrastructure 12) offers teaching staff access to a plagiarism detection tool (Turnitin). Students have access to a corresponding tool (Turnitin Draft Coach) using Online Microsoft 365.

8. Personal data protection policy, security of distance learning information systems

The A.U.T.H. has a personal data protection policy in compliance with the relevant provisions as stated on the website (<https://www.auth.gr/gdpr/>). The horizontal services of the A.U.T.H. hosted in its central computing infrastructures, follow the security policy of the A.U.T.H. as stated on the website (https://it.auth.gr/information_security/) and are certified with ISO 27001:2013 for the Information Security Management System that follows. The modern distance learning services follow the corresponding terms of Third Party Service Provision (Google Apps for Education, Microsoft Office 365, Zoom) at the A.U.T.H., as stated on the website <https://it.auth.gr/thirdpartycloudterms/>.

9. Criteria for periodic internal evaluation of distance postgraduate study programs

The policies and procedures for the regular monitoring, evaluation and review of the P.M.S. aim to maintain the level of educational services and to create a supportive and effective learning environment for students. The internal evaluation of the P.M.S. is a process provided by the Quality Assurance Unit of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and is carried out with criteria in accordance with the Quality Standards of the Hellenic University of Thessaloniki and the Quality Assurance Principles of the European Higher Education Area.

Specifically, for the Master's Degrees implemented using distance learning methods, the internal evaluation checks the following elements:

- The content of the curriculum in accordance with the most recent research in each subject, so as to ensure the modern character of the Master's Degree.
- The effective design of the curriculum, which must be fully harmonized with the methodology of distance learning and the need for student interaction with the curriculum.
- Participation in teacher training programs focusing on interaction and the specificities of distance learning.
- The workload, course and completion of postgraduate studies with the distance learning methodology.
- The design of an evaluation framework, focusing on the distance learning methodology, including clearly defined evaluation criteria for student work and the final examination.
- Student expectations and needs, as well as their satisfaction with their curriculum, with a specific plan to ensure student interaction with each other, with teaching staff and educational materials using distance learning.
- The maximum utilization of the capabilities of the distance learning technologies provided by the Foundation, the supporting services and their suitability for the mentioned M.A.S.

10. Student registration process in the AUTH student registry

The AUTH P.M.S. may utilize the AUTH electronic secretariat service to securely manage the student's entire journey through a single system, from the application stage and the registration process in the AUTH (AUTH student registry) to graduation.

All student applications for certificates/attestations and any planned actions for course registrations, etc. are completed through the same system.

- <https://enrollment.auth.gr/> (Environment for initial application for participation in a study program)
- <https://it.auth.gr/manuals/registrar/> (Guide to the registry management environment)
- <https://it.auth.gr/manuals/facultyauth/> (Guide to the faculty environment)
- <https://it.auth.gr/manuals/studentsauth/> (Guide to the student environment)

11. Required actions

The competent body of the Master of Science may take the following actions:

To define the pedagogical framework for the design and implementation of courses and other educational activities using distance learning methods and student assessment.

To define the process of educational support for students.

To proceed with documentation regarding the possibility and suitability of the cognitive subject of the Master of Science. to be organized using distance learning methods. In order to document the suitability of the subject, it is proposed that it be accompanied by some examples of similar programs in Greece and abroad, which are conducted using distance learning methods. For subjects that have a strong laboratory or applied nature, it is proposed to list either the methods of adequate educational substitution (e.g. virtual laboratories), or the explicit mention of the courses that are conducted in person in blended learning programs.

To conduct an analysis of the proposed methods of organizing the educational process (in person, synchronous, asynchronous, mixed system) per educational activity of the curriculum, distribution of teaching hours of each educational activity of the Master of Science (MSc) per implementation method and the percentage of any asynchronous distance learning per educational activity and in total in the program. In order to capture the full distribution of hours in synchronous and asynchronous education, it is recommended to use a table with appropriate documentation. It is also necessary to document the hours corresponding to the part of asynchronous education in terms of workload.

To define the digital educational material and the evaluation methods”.

In other respects, the decision of the Senate of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki with number 78656/19-6-2023 (Government Gazette 4084/issue B/ 23-6-2023) shall apply.

This decision shall be published in the Government Gazette.