

CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION
(for Educational Institutions)

Instruction
on the Use of Distance Learning
in Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties

Vatican City
2021

I. PREFACE

Since the early years of this millennium, the influence of digital means of communication on the world of formation and teaching has drawn attention to the broad category of “distance learning”. This is not only a technological innovation that has been introduced into the world of university formation: it is also something capable of profoundly changing academic culture and of rewriting practices for how to educate and learn, as well as the goals of formation.

Therefore, even before the publication of the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*¹, the Holy See has shown an interest in this way of teaching. Indeed, some years ago the Congregation for Catholic Education granted to certain Higher Institutes of Religious Sciences license to teach some courses by distance learning, as long as certain conditions were fulfilled as regards the students’ formation as part of a community. In fact, Catholic education is never a mere process of passing on facts and intellectual skills: rather, its aim is to contribute to the person’s holistic formation in its various aspects (intellectual, cultural, spiritual, etc.), including, for example, community life and relations within the academic community, in close contact with the teachers, administrative and service personnel and the other students.

A further step forward took place with publication of the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*. Ecclesiastical Faculties and Universities now have the possibility, with the previous consent of this Dicastery, of drawing up Plans of Studies where “part of the courses can be realized by distance learning” (VG, *Norms of Application*², art. 33 § 2).

The aim of this Instruction – the result of a wide-ranging consultation of all Ecclesiastical Faculties and Universities (q.v. Circular Letter n. 1, of 8 December 2018), expert contributions from international specialists in the field, as well as proposals from the Members of this Congregation and from various administrations of the Roman Curia – is to offer guidelines and rules for using distance learning in Ecclesiastical Faculties and Universities.

II. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

Before presenting the guidelines and rules for the use of distance learning, it is important to refer to the reasoning followed by the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* and to clarify some terminology.

THE APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTION *VERITATIS GAUDIUM*

¹ Franciscus PP., Constitutio Apostolica de studiorum Universitatibus et Facultatibus Ecclesiasticis *Veritatis gaudium*, 8 decembris 2017 [= VG].

² Congregatio de Institutione Catholica, Ordinationes ad Constitutionem Apostolicam « *Veritatis gaudium* » rite exsequendam, 27 decembris 2017 [= VG, *Norms of Application*].

The Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* introduces some important elements regarding various themes to do with the diverse forms of distance learning, such as: the development of information technology; recent teaching methods; and networking.

- It insists on “the urgent need for ‘networking’ between those institutions” (VG, *Foreword*, 4d);
- It underlines that “universities constitute the main centres of scientific research for the advancement of knowledge and of society; they play a decisive role in economic social and cultural development, especially in a time like our own, marked as it is by rapid, constant and far-reaching changes in the fields of science and technology” (VG, *Foreword*, 5);
- It tells Ecclesiastical Faculties that “up-to-date didactic and teaching methods should be applied in an appropriate way, in order to bring about the personal involvement of the students and their active participation in their studies” (VG, 37 § 2);
- It encourages Ecclesiastical Faculties to make use of “information and technical audio-visual equipment, etc., to assist its didactic and research work” (VG, 56 § 1);
- It invites Ecclesiastical Faculties, whether of the same region or of a wider territorial area, to cooperate in fostering “the advance of interdisciplinary collaboration, which appears to be ever more necessary”; to contribute “to the development of complementarity among the various Faculties”; and, in general, to help “to bring about the diffusion of Christian wisdom throughout all culture” (VG, 66);
- Finally, it clarifies that “part of the courses can be realized by distance learning, if the Plan of Studies approved by the Congregation for Catholic Education foresees it and specifies its conditions, especially as regards the examinations” (VG, *Norms of Application*, art. 33 § 2).

CLARIFICATION ON THE TERMINOLOGY USED REGARDING DISTANCE LEARNING

To receive either an academic degree in one of the three cycles or another award, the student must satisfy the conditions laid out in the Faculty’s Statutes, i.e.: 1) be regularly matriculated; 2) have completed the prescribed course of studies (quantified in comparable formative credits or in sufficient ECTS); 3) have passed the relative examinations and, where applicable, some other means of examination (q.v. VG, art. 48).

As regards the second above-mentioned condition, each Ecclesiastical Faculty must organize its Plan of Studies following the guiding principles presented by the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*, remembering that “ecclesiastical studies cannot be limited to passing on knowledge, professional competence and experience to the men and women of our time who desire to grow as Christians, but must also take up the urgent task of developing intellectual tools that can serve as paradigms for action and thought, useful for preaching” (VG, *Foreword*, 5). In other words, the scientific work of a student in an Ecclesiastical Faculty is not simply to complete the Plan of Studies, obtaining the respective comparable formative credits/ECTS. Rather, the student must broaden the horizon of his or her academic formation by frequenting lectures; by participating in assignments and frequenting seminars; by private study; by his or her personal work under the guidance of the teachers; by writing papers; by actively joining in with other students;

by research; by pastoral action; and by taking examinations (q.v. VG, art. 33; VG, *Norms of Application*, arts. 3, 32, 33 § 1).

Therefore, with this Instruction, the Congregation is inviting all Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties to delve ever deeper into the innovations contained in the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*, and to make ever more appropriate use of the new forms of technology, together with developing forms of cooperation and of shared research, and with a care for the quality of their technology and pedagogy. At the same time, the Congregation recommends that Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties give more attention to specifically preparing their teachers and tutors in the proper use of the new pedagogical methods and didactic instruments.

Ways of Teaching the Courses on Offer

The offering of a course or discipline takes place via three basic factors, i.e., teaching, accompaniment and evaluation. From these combined elements derives a certain educational category or way of approaching the teaching matter.

1. “In presence” or “immediate” learning: the term “immediate” indicates the direct interaction between teacher and student, and among the students, and has no need of intermediaries or instruments.
2. “Mediated” learning: i.e. where teaching, accompaniment and evaluation take place via a telematics platform.
3. Blended Learning: i.e. a process of teaching, learning and evaluation that takes place by alternating immediate and mediated learning.

Forms of Distance Learning

To build up and consolidate the academic community, it is necessary to guarantee meetings via:

1. **Lectures** given in a lecture-hall with the students physically present (i.e. ordinary lectures).
2. **On-line in-presence lectures**: the teacher, using particular pedagogical methods and didactic instruments specific to distance learning, gives the lecture or carries out the planned activity in real time, live and telematically, with the (synchronic) participation of the students, who moreover can interact both with the teacher and with their class companions.
3. **Extraordinary Sessions**: the students can be called together in a physical place for specific events, such as the start of the course to present the material or the end of the course for a final synthesis, as well as for formation conferences.
4. **Personalized meetings** (individual or in small groups): in this kind of meeting questions are answered, activities take place, continuous evaluation happens, and evaluation is given of the course’s teaching exercises.
5. Necessary meetings, complementary to other normal instruments such as **didactic facilities**, in addition to personal study and time given to reading, understanding and carrying out of activities proper to each material.

Academic Relationships

Distance learning, whether by blended learning or “mediated” learning, presupposes that the student develops and forms relationships with the various members of the academic community:

1. The **teacher** is to give the courses and offer his/her learning via the students’ participation in the in-presence lectures or via lectures on-line. This relationship also includes direct contact with the students, the duty of answering their questions, as well as correcting their exercises, communicating their results and correcting their mistakes. In some cases, it may prove useful to have a course manual and/or a presentation of contents by means of appropriate didactic facilities. It must be emphasized that, with regard to distance learning, there is no change to the regulations regarding the teachers’ stability, the academic degrees they must have, and all other requirements for teachers in whatever Ecclesiastical institution.
2. The **tutor** (who can be the same person as the teacher) is to guide the students in their studies and answer practical questions regarding their studies. He/she must be accessible at pre-arranged hours, either in-presence via colloquia or in videoconference (individual calls or in small groups), by telephone, by mail or by e-mail, using an official telematic platform of the Ecclesiastical University or Faculty. The tutoring sessions are all the more important in blended learning and mediated learning, where the students have greater need of accompaniment with respect to immediate learning.
3. The relationships with the other **students**, by means of: a) physical, in-presence meetings that can be organized; b) on-line participation at lectures, where the students get to know each other and share learning experiences; c) the spaces offered by the virtual campus for each subject, where the students can interact by participating in blogs and forums. They can also work together on tasks assigned by the tutor who guides the virtual campus.
4. The **academic authorities**: both students and teachers must have access, either directly or via a students’ delegate, to the Ecclesiastical Faculty’s academic authorities, so they can present suggestions, concerns, problems and other matters; or so they can contact the services of the Secretariat to have documents issued, with freedom of information while safeguarding people’s right to privacy. Likewise, the Faculty or University must appoint a delegate charged with guaranteeing and supervising the regulations concerning the dignity and respect for individuals but also for the institution itself.

The Students

Ecclesiastical Faculties are normally attended by clerics and laity who are preparing for research, teaching or pastoral activity, or for carrying out particular ecclesiastical duties (q.v. VG, arts. 76, 77, 85 § d; VG, *Norms of Application*, art. 3).

Nevertheless, the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* itself insists on the fact that “for the whole People of God to be ready to embark upon a new stage of ‘Spirit-filled’ evangelization. This calls for ‘a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform’. In this process, a fitting renewal of the system of ecclesiastical studies plays a strategic role” (VG, *Foreword*, 3).

Therefore, by making use of distance learning, Ecclesiastical Faculties could broaden the academic formation they offer, to reach those who, in one way or another, are involved in evangelizing activities, such as:

1. **Pastoral workers**, who go “from bishops down to those who provide the most humble and hidden services.” This means creating “places where faith itself in the crucified and risen Jesus is renewed, where the most profound questions and daily concerns are shared, where deeper discernment about our experiences and life itself is undertaken in the light of the Gospel, for the purpose of directing individual and social decisions towards the good and beautiful” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, nn. 76-77).
2. **Members of Institutes of Contemplative Life**, which include the whole gamut of monastic and contemplative life. They can be offered an academic and cultural formation marked by a “particular feature, in the formation of a Christian culture, of discovering in the whole of creation the Trinitarian imprint that makes the cosmos in which we live a ‘network of relations’ in which ‘it is proper to every living being to tend towards other things’. This in turn fosters ‘a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity’” (VG, *Foreword*, 4 a).
3. The **human peripheries**, which include those conditions of existence marked by marginalization, abandonment, pain, deprivation, loss of meaning and hope. The poor, the sick, the marginalized, migrants, itinerants, circus workers, stateless people, prisoners, people who are alone, and those who live and work on the sea or on the streets are those who should be assisted; taken care of; and humanly, socially and spiritually helped (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate*, n. 135).

It pertains to the Congregation for Catholic Education to evaluate and approve requests for Plans of Studies for students belonging to these three groups; in doing so, it will consider the particular circumstances, with respect to the objectives, the teaching itself and the quality of the above-mentioned Catholic education. It will also ask the opinion of the pertinent offices of the Bishops’ Conference or Oriental Hierarchical Structure or of the Major Superior.

The Library and Database

Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties must guarantee access to their libraries and databases for those students who use distance learning; because, without a library and databases there can be no scientific formation, introduction to research or research itself. Any student who is regularly matriculated has a right to access the library and databases; this access must be included in the academic fees, taking into account the kind of use for which the service is made available.

Evaluation

Students who use distance learning can be evaluated in two compatible and complementary ways:

1. **Continual evaluation:** i.e., pre-arranged learning activities at intervals during the course, which the students must pass to be able to sit the final evaluation. These activities may take place via a telematic platform.
2. **Final evaluation,** which verifies whether the student has acquired the knowledge and competences associated with each subject's learning outcomes. The student must pass this test or examination to qualify in the particular subject. If the student fails in the final evaluation, the results of the continual evaluation cannot be used.

The **continual evaluation** and the **final evaluation** can be realized in one of the following three ways:

- 1) When the examiner and the student are in the same physical location, for the realization of the oral or written evaluation;
- 2) When the examiner realizes the test or examination via an online lecture. In that case, the telematic platform must guarantee a respect for the norms of security and privacy required by law, which make this method similar to physical, in-presence evaluation;
- 3) When the evaluation is carried out via assignments (but not written examinations) that take place on a telematic platform.

III. NORMS

In response to the demands of Catholic education and in light of what has been described above, with this Instruction the Congregation for Catholic Education establishes some norms for the correct use of distance learning in all Ecclesiastical institutions of higher education – Universities, Faculties and Institutes *ad instar Facultatis* – which have been duly erected or approved by the Holy See. The norms will also be applicable to incorporated, aggregated and affiliated Institutes, as well as Higher Institutes of Religious Sciences, that are associated with an Ecclesiastical Faculty; but only where the Institute has the requirements necessary for employing distance learning, and upon request and with the assistance of the same connecting Faculty.

In this Instruction, for *distance learning* is meant the “mixed” method of teaching, which combines immediate and mediated teaching, according to the requirements that will henceforth be specified, in consideration of the bilateral and multilateral agreements that have been entered into by the Holy See with various countries or with the Universities themselves.

Admissions criteria for the Programmes of the Plan of Studies

Art. 1. § 1. Ecclesiastical Faculties can offer programmes with canonical effect and other programmes without canonical effect. With the former, the Faculties confer comparable formative credits/ECTS and grant degrees that are recognized by the Holy See: these are the so-called **canonical degrees** (q.v. VG, art. 46). With the latter, with the *nihil obstat* of the Congregation for Catholic Education, the Faculties confer comparable formative credits/ECTS, but their diplomas have no canonical effect: these are the so-called **other awards** conferred by the Ecclesiastical Faculty or University (q.v. VG, art. 52; VG, *Norms of Application*, art. 41).

§ 2. The admissions criteria for distance-learning programmes are the same as those for programmes of physical, in-presence teaching. For the **canonical degrees**, the admissions criteria are those foreseen by current canonical legislation and are indicated in the Statutes. A particular requirement regards the admissions procedure for university studies foreseen by the legislation of the country where the Ecclesiastical Faculty is found (q.v. VG, arts. 31-32; VG, *Norms of Application*, art. 26).

§ 3. For **other awards**, the admissions criteria for university studies where the Ecclesiastical Faculty is found are to be adopted. Also as regards these other awards, it lies within the Faculty's discretion whether to admit students who have not completed Ecclesiastical studies, on condition that they have *at least* the minimum requirements necessary (q.v. VG, arts. 31-32; VG, *Norms of Application*, art. 26).

Insertion within the Holy See's Qualifications Framework

Art. 2. § 1. Studies that can be taught by distance learning are the **canonical degrees** that form part of the Holy See's Qualifications Framework.

§ 2. In addition, **other awards** can be included in distance learning which, with the required *nihil obstat* of the Congregation, confer at least 30 or more comparable formative credits/ECTS, or the equivalent of one or more semesters of full-time university studies, according to the conditions foreseen by the canonical legislation.

Canonical Degrees and Other Awards Conferred at the Conclusion of the Programme

Art. 3. The offering of degrees by means of programmes that partly include distance learning must be that relating to the **canonical degrees** (Baccalaureate, Licentiate and Doctorate) in Ecclesiastical academic institutions erected or approved by the Congregation for Catholic Education, as well as that relating to **other awards** for which the Congregation has granted its *nihil obstat*.

Percentages to be Used in Distance Learning

For the Canonical Degrees:

Art. 4

For the Canonical Degrees, the Plans of Studies (approved by the Congregation for Catholic Education) establish obligatory subjects (principal or auxiliary), free i.e. optional subjects, assignments and seminars (VG, *Norms of Application*, arts. 30-32).

Baccalaureate (First Cycle):

§ 1. Since the Baccalaureate is considered the introductory basis for the Ecclesiastical sciences, as well as for the scientific methodology (q.v. VG, art. 39 a), distance learning is not permitted for the obligatory subjects, assignments or seminars, except for the following specific cases. Distance learning is permitted up to a maximum of 30 percent of the comparable formative credits/ECTS for the optional subjects. The evaluation of these comparable formative credits/ECTS will be carried out according to the physical, in-presence method. It belongs to the Congregation for Catholic Education to approve these Plans of Studies.

§ 2. In affiliated and aggregated Institutes, Ecclesiastical Faculties can, should conditions allow, teach those free i.e. optional subjects that can be taught via distance learning during the first cycle. The evaluation of these comparable formative credits/ECTS will be carried out according to the physical, in-presence method. It belongs to the Congregation for Catholic Education to approve these Plans of Studies, upon request of the affiliating or aggregating Faculty.

§ 3. In Higher Institutes of Religious Sciences, Ecclesiastical Faculties of Theology can formulate Plans of Studies for the first cycle in which 30 percent of the total number of comparable formative credits/ECTS of the subjects can be given over to distance learning. The evaluation of these comparable formative credits/ECTS will be carried out via the physical, in-presence method. It belongs to the Congregation for Catholic Education to approve these Plans of Studies, upon request of the Faculty to which the same Institutes are connected.

§ 4. In the case of pastoral workers, Ecclesiastical Faculties can formulate first-cycle Plans of Studies where a part of the subjects can be taught via distance learning. The evaluation of these comparable formative credits/ECTS will be carried out via the physical, in-presence method. It belongs to the Congregation for Catholic Education to approve these Plans of Studies.

§ 5. In the case of students who belong to the contemplative life, Ecclesiastical Faculties can formulate first-cycle Plans of Studies where the subjects can be taught via distance learning. The evaluation of these comparable formative credits/ECTS will preferably be carried out via the physical, in-presence method. It belongs to the Congregation for Catholic Education to approve these Plans of Studies.

§ 6. In the case of students belonging to the human peripheries, Ecclesiastical Faculties can formulate first-cycle Plans of Studies where the subjects could be taught via distance learning. The evaluation of these comparable formative credits/ECTS will preferably be carried out via the physical, in-presence method. It belongs to the Congregation for Catholic Education to approve these Plans of Studies.

Art. 5.

Licentiate (Second Cycle):

§ 1. Since the Licentiate is considered as a cycle for deepening one's study of a particular area of Ecclesiastical subjects (q.v. VG, art. 39 b), Ecclesiastical Faculties can develop Plans of Studies where 30 percent of the total *number* of comparable formative credits/ECTS of the obligatory or optional subjects can be given over to distance learning, following a plan of personalized teaching. The assignments and seminars must always be via the physical, in-presence method. The evaluation of these comparable formative credits/ECTS, too, will be carried out via the physical, in-presence method. It belongs to the Congregation for Catholic Education to approve these Plans of Studies.

§ 2. In aggregated and incorporated Institutes, Ecclesiastical Faculties can, should conditions allow, teach those obligatory or optional subjects that can follow the distance-learning method during the second cycle. The evaluation of these comparable formative credits/ECTS will be carried out via the physical, in-presence method. It belongs to the Congregation for Catholic Education to approve these Plans of Studies, upon request of the aggregating or incorporating Faculty.

§ 3. In Higher Institutes of Religious Sciences, Ecclesiastical Faculties of Theology can formulate second-cycle Plans of Studies where 30 percent of the number of comparable formative credits/ECTS of the subjects can follow the distance-learning method. The evaluation of these comparable formative credits/ECTS is to be carried out in a physical, in-presence way. It belongs to the Congregation for Catholic Education to approve these Plans of Studies, upon request of the Faculty to which the same Institutes are connected.

§ 4. In the case of pastoral workers, Ecclesiastical Faculties can formulate second-cycle Plans of Studies where some of the subjects are taught via distance learning. The evaluation of these comparable formative credits/ECTS is to be carried out via the physical, in-presence method. It belongs to the Congregation for Catholic Education to approve these Plans of Studies.

§ 5. In the case of students dedicated to the contemplative life, Ecclesiastical Faculties can formulate second-cycle Plans of Studies where some of the subjects can be taught via distance learning. The evaluation of these comparable formative credits/ECTS will preferably be carried out via the physical, in-presence method. It belongs to the Congregation for Catholic Education to approve these Plans of Studies.

§ 6. In the case of students coming from the human peripheries, Ecclesiastical Faculties can formulate second-cycle Plans of Studies where the subjects could be taught via distance learning. The evaluation of these comparable formative credits/ECTS will preferably be carried out via the physical, in-presence method. It belongs to the Congregation for Catholic Education to approve these Plans of Studies.

Art. 6

Doctorate (Third Cycle):

§ 1. Since this is considered as a cycle in which the scientific maturity of the student is expressed (q.v. VG, art. 39 c), a part of the comparable formative credits/ECTS dedicated to the path of formation can be delivered via distance learning. The evaluation of these comparable formative credits/ECTS is to be carried out via the physical, in-presence method. It pertains to the Congregation for Catholic Education to approve these Plans of Studies.

§ 2. In incorporated Institutes, Ecclesiastical Faculties can, should conditions allow, offer those subjects that can be taught via distance learning during the third cycle.

Art. 7

As Part of Other Awards

§ 1. Since these are considered as qualifications aimed at presenting and deepening a specific aspect of Christian truth (q.v. VG, *Foreword*, 4 a), the subjects can be taught, in part or in whole, via distance learning, according to what the Ecclesiastical Faculty decides.

§ 2. It is highly advisable that the Ecclesiastical Faculty offer qualifications inspired by the criteria of interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity (**other awards**), to pastoral workers, to members of communities of contemplative life and to people coming from the human peripheries.

Academic Relations

Art. 8. § 1. Since an Ecclesiastical Faculty is a “community of study, research and formation, which operates, on an official level, in pursuit of its primary aims, listed in article 3 [VG], in conformity with the principles of the evangelizing mission of the Church” (VG, art. 11 § 1), it is necessary that, in distance learning, there be constant and sincere relations with the teacher, the tutor, among the students and with the academic management.

§ 2. Teachers of whatever subject that is taught by distance learning must refer to the regulations that pertain to them as promulgated by the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* and by the Statutes of the Ecclesiastical Faculty or University.

§ 3. A tutor who is not also the teacher can never step beyond his or her specific competences: i.e. to guide the student in his or her studies and resolve practical questions regarding those studies; as well as to be accessible during pre-established times, in-presence via colloquia or by videoconference (individual calls or in small groups) by telephone, by mail or by email, by means of the Ecclesiastical Faculty’s or University’s official telematic platform.

Necessary Meetings in Distance Learning

Art. 9. Ecclesiastical Faculties must offer several means to facilitate and encourage communication and teaching between teacher and student in distance learning. The following are considered necessary: ordinary lectures; in-presence online lectures; extraordinary sessions; personalized meetings; the use of teaching materials; and access to the library and databases.

Evaluations and Forms of Monitoring

Art. 10. § 1. Evaluation in distance learning includes two necessary elements: continual evaluation and the final evaluation.

§ 2. Evaluations can be monitored thus:

- a) For the **canonical degrees**, the final evaluation is to be carried out with a supervising teacher at the place of the examination, where the student will physically be.
- b) For the **other awards**, the final evaluation is to be conducted according to the mixed-teaching methodology.

§ 3. The evaluation, both continual and final, is the exclusive responsibility of the teacher of the subject taught by distance learning. It can never be delegated either to the tutor or to another teacher.

Telematic Platform

Art. 11. Distance learning must be carried out via a telematic platform that can offer both teacher and student:

A)

§ 1. In-presence online lectures.

- § 2. Interaction with the teacher: a useful means for accompanying and teaching.
- § 3. Interaction with the tutor who checks the student's understanding, resolves practical matters and answers questions.
- § 4. Interaction with other students who are following the same subject matter.
- § 5. The creation of working groups, where questions can be raised and where the students work together in learning the material.
- § 6. The “telematic noticeboard”, which normally offers:
- an archive of documentation;
 - a work community (for the teachers, for the students and/or for the teachers and students);
 - possible exercises for checking one's understanding and for self-evaluation;
 - its own social network dedicated to the students and teachers of the *particular* Institute;
 - telematic access to some administrative services.
- § 7. The platform must guarantee the protection of personal and academic data, the adequate identification of the people involved and of the means of verifying the written tests and/or examinations for the continual evaluation – with a view to possible revisions or disputes –; the verification of the originality of the written texts (antiplagiarism programmes); etc.

B)

In those countries or regions where it is not possible to make use of a telematic platform, Ecclesiastical Faculties can offer other formation activities by means of textbooks, bibliographical texts, etc. It belongs to the Congregation for Catholic Education to approve these teaching methods.

Reference to AVEPRO for Quality Assurance

Art. 12. Ecclesiastical Faculties are normally subject to evaluation by the Holy See's Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (AVEPRO) (q.v. VG, *Norms of Application*, art. 1, § 2). In light of the documents published by AVEPRO, Ecclesiastical Faculties must guarantee, as part of their regulatory framework, the quality of their teaching offered by distance learning, by means of monitoring and evaluating this methodology via active input from the students.

Joint Programmes

Art. 13. In conformity with what the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* (q.v. VG, Foreword, 4 § d) has directed, the option of offering some programmes in conjunction with other Universities is highly to be recommended. In choosing such Universities, those more skilled and experienced in distance learning and endowed with unquestionable academic excellence – as foreseen by this Instruction – should be privileged.

Academic Fees

Art. 14. § 1. Ecclesiastical Faculties can establish a table of academic fees for distance learning, weighing up possible criteria for modifying such fees with a view to technological costs and the availability of teachers, and in consideration of the use to which the service is made available.

§ 2. Ecclesiastical Faculties are invited to offer forms of economic support or exemption for those who come from the “human peripheries” or, in some other way, are from demonstrably deprived conditions.

Final Clauses

Art. 15. In case of real need (for example, natural disasters, health emergencies, etc.), the Congregation for Catholic Education can dispense from obligation to observe any article of this Instruction, as well as of the Plans of Studies approved by an Ecclesiastical University or Faculty.

Art. 16. This Instruction will enter into force on the first day of the academic year 2021-2022 or of the academic year 2022, according to the academic calendar of the various geographical areas.

Art. 17. Any modification of Statutes or Plans of Studies requires the approval of the Congregation for Catholic Education.

Art. 18. It will be the task of the Congregation for Catholic Education, whenever, with the passing of time, altered circumstances will require it, to propose changes to be made to this Instruction, so that the Instruction itself may be continually adapted to the new need of Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties.

Art. 19. Norms and customs currently in force, which are contrary to this Instruction, are abrogated.

Rome, from the offices of the Congregation for Catholic Education, 13 May 2021, on the Solemnity of the Ascension of Our Lord.

Giuseppe Card. VERSALDI
Prefect

Angelo Vincenzo ZANI
Titular Archbishop of Volturno
Secretary

Appendix

Documents requested by the Congregation for Catholic Education for the approval of the distance teaching modality

- Letter of request for the introduction of distance learning, formulated by the Grand Chancellor of the University/Ecclesiastical Faculty.
- Copy of the minutes of the Faculty Council approving the courses/disciplines that may be taught via distance learning.
- Full description of the official telematic platform of the University/Ecclesiastical Faculty/connected Institute, as well as the link that guarantees the Congregation access to this platform and to the library during the approval phase.
- Text of the Statutes of the University/Ecclesiastical Faculty/connected Institute, specifying the paragraphs that have been modified to meet the requirements of distance learning.
- Plan of studies for each cycle or other award, specifying the courses/disciplines that may be imparted via distance learning.
- Table of academic fees for distance learning, and forms of financial support or exemption for those from the human peripheries.
- In the case of students from connected Institutes, pastoral agents, students dedicated to the contemplative life and those coming from the human peripheries, it is necessary to have the opinion of the Bishops' Conference / Oriental Hierarchical Structure or the Major Superior of the place where they reside.