Response to

the Covid-19 Pandemic

Abdullah Gul University

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INDEX

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic affected all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) worldwide throughout the unprecedented year of 2020. In Turkey, the Higher Education Council (HEC), the governmental body responsible for regulating all universities, both public and private, across the country, decided to interrupt the spring semester on 16 March 2020and requested universities to shift to distance education immediately after a three-week break. Following the HEC's decision, the Abdullah Gul University (AGU) senior management held many meetings and formed strategies to ensure the continuation and effective implementation of university activities during this unexpected crisis. In so doing, AGU thoroughly analysed the different measures taken by American and European institutions during this period in order to efficiently plan its own transition process. AGU held its first virtual/online general academic assembly meeting on 16 March 2020 to bring together all academics and student groups with the aim to arrange the continuity of educational and research activities.

The institutional decisions made in response to the Covid-19 crisis focus on five different areas: (1) the framework of course (re)design for online education and the platforms to be used, (2) the operation of laboratories for research, (3) the infrastructure and technical necessities of remote learning and teaching, (4) the operation of campus dormitories for foreign students and other students in need, (5) the well-being of students and staff.

With a participatory approach, decisions were implemented in the quickest and most effective way. During this general academic assembly meeting, the "AGU Online Education Task Force" was established in order to carry on the university's teaching and learning activities. This task force benefited from the precious contributions of the different academic department heads, the Student Affairs Office, the IT Office and the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CeLT).

AGU's full institutional transition to distance education and services became operational only two weeks after the national decision to shift to online learning. The first

chapter of this report provides detailed information about AGU's transition to online education starting with the School of Foreign Languages as well as undergraduate and graduate degree programmes. The second section of this chapter addresses assessment practices, students' feedback, and the decisions taken to improve the online education process. The third section focuses on the importance of faculty development, and provides examples of best practices. The fourth section provides information on the events and activities that were initiated by different university support offices.

The second chapter provides detailed information on the different measures (sanitary, safety, entertainment, etc.) implemented at the administrative level in a response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The third chapter of this report addresses AGU's contribution to its community and society as a whole during the pandemic. The report ends with discussion and concluding remarks.

Chapter 2: From Face-to-Face to Online Education

AGU started to conduct foreign language and graduate courses online on 23 March 2020, and undergraduate courses on 30 March. This transition was accomplished using a combination of synchronous and asynchronous methods.

AGU had been using different learning management systems for many years prior to the pandemic: Schoology[1] for the School of Foreign Languages and CANVAS[2] for undergraduate and graduate programmes. Both platforms continue to be used for communication, design of lectures, discussion and assessment, and for other educational activities to facilitate both the synchronous and asynchronous dimensions of online education.

Several video communication platforms such as Zoom,[3] Webex,[4] and Microsoft Teams,[5] were considered for synchronous classes, digital office hours, and meetings, and Zoom was finally selected for its robust, high-quality, and user-friendly infrastructure. The requisite Zoom licenses were immediately purchased, and a licensed account was assigned for each classroom, enabling staff to hold synchronous sessions without interruption. In order to prevent schedule conflicts, the weekly schedule prepared for face-to-face education continued to be used.

In addition to these platforms, 1TB of cloud storage was provided through Microsoft's OneDrive[6] for each student and faculty member. This space was especially meant for the storage of recorded materials. Tools such as email and WhatsApp[7] were used more frequently to increase communication options with and between students. Applications and platforms such as Mural,[8] Miro,[9] JamBoard,[10] Kahoot,[11] Sli.do,[12] and

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[1] Schoology: a learning management system.
[2] Canvas: a learning management system.
[3] Zoom: a video-web conferencing programme.
[4] Webex: Cisco's video conferencing, online meetings, screen sharing, and webinar programme.
[5] Microsoft Teams: a chat-based collaboration platform enabling document-sharing and online meetings.
[6] OneDrive: Microsoft's cloud-storage service.
[7] WhatsApp: a messaging application enabling text, chat, and media sharing, including voice messages and video, with individuals or groups.
[8] Mural: a digital workplace for visual collaboration.

Mentimeter[13] continued to be used in the teaching and learning processes to enhance student engagement and group work. Software tools such as MATLAB[14] and Proteus[15] were made accessible for teaching and learning at no cost.

From the beginning of the online education process, students' learning experience and satisfaction were measured intermittently using anonymous surveys. In addition to student surveys, faculty-member focused surveys were conducted throughout the year, and some problems faced during online education were mentioned by the teaching staff. After the analyses of these survey results by the AGU upper administration, new measures for improvement were adopted such as regulation changes and new methods.

A webpage[16] was established to inform students and faculty members about the changes related to the pandemic and the shift to online education, and it continues to be updated frequently. Additionally, 24-hour technical support was established both for faculty members and students.

The School of Foreign Languages

The English Language School (ELS) at AGU had already been using the blended approach (both using online materials and in-class teaching) for many years prior to the pandemic. Both for Faculty English classes and for the much larger English Preparatory Programme,[17] the ELS at AGU already had a vast stock of online teaching and learning materials. Hence, when the suspension of on-campus teaching and was announced on

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[9] Miro: an online collaborative "whiteboarding" platform.

[10] JamBoard: Google's interactive whiteboard for collaboration.

[11] Kahoot: a game-based learning platform.

[12] Sli.do: a digital Q&A and poling platform.

[13] Mentimeter: a presentation tool with real-time feedback.

[14] MATLAB: a programming platform designed specifically for engineers and scientists.

[15] Proteus: a proprietary software tool suite used primarily for electronic design automation.

[16] Webpage: in English http://www.agu.edu.tr/remote-learning and in Turkish http://www.agu.edu.tr/uzaktan-egitim

[17] Like many universities in Turkey, AGU tests the English proficiency of incoming students who will take classes in English and requires those students who lack the requisite proficiency in English to spend one year in an intensive English-language preparatory programme, where they study English as a foreign language with 20-22 hours of instruction per week.

16 March, the ELS was already in a strong position to shift its programmes to distance mode. Thanks to this advantage, the ELS was able to start a full programme of teaching after a delay of just one week on 23 March.

Some major decisions were taken early, and did not need to be changed:

1. The majority of what was previously classroom-based work was carried out in modified form via the programme Zoom. These teaching sessions were defined as 'synchronous' lessons.

2. Students were encouraged and expected (for assessment purposes) to engage fully with other teaching and learning materials on Schoology. This engagement was defined as 'asynchronous.'

3. The nature of assessment, which was very heavily exam-based, remained the same while the mode of delivery of those exams was modified: paper and pencil assessments were converted into similar exams available synchronously to students via Schoology; for invigilation, the classroom teacher presence was replaced by Zoom invigilation sessions that students were obliged to attend as they wrote. Speaking assessment interviews previously held in classrooms were also held over Zoom.

For all components of language learning with the exception of speaking, the number of synchronous sessions taught in online education was less than had been taught during face-to-face teaching. It proved particularly difficult to find the best balance of synchronous and asynchronous work for the teaching of the skill of listening.

To ascertain the sentiment towards distance learning of all our stakeholders, both students and instructors were surveyed. There was a consensus that while circumstances were not ideal, and that in particular an important social and face-to-face interaction dimension was lost, the English programmes offered by the ELS were still rigorous and effective.

Schools and Departments

Starting on 13 March 2020, all faculties took immediate action in accordance with the Council of Higher Education and the University Administration policies and recommendations.
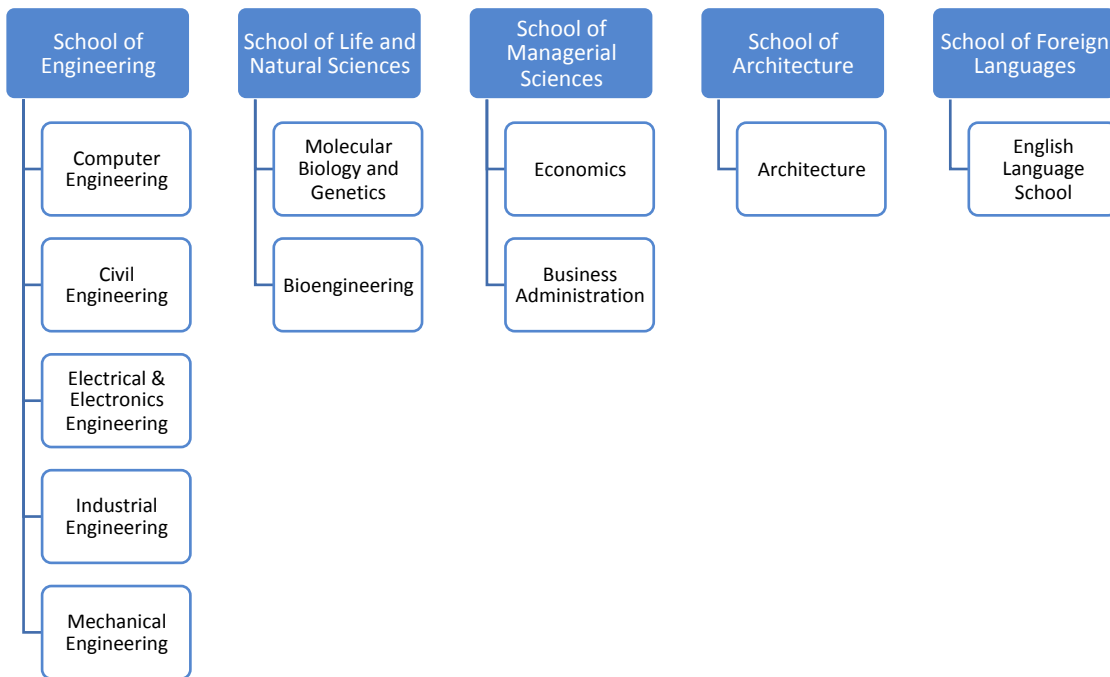
School of Engineering	School of Life and Natural Sciences	School of Managerial Sciences	School of Architecture	School of Foreign Languages
Computer Engineering	Molecular Biology and Genetics	Economics	Architecture	English Language School
Civil Engineering	Bioengineering	Business Administration		
Electrical & Electronics Engineering				
Industrial Engineering				
Mechanical Engineering				

Figure 1. Active Schools and Departments at AGU

Undergraduate Programmes

All educational activities, such as courses, exams, quizzes, office-hours, and supervisory meetings were immediately transferred online to prevent the spread of the virus within the university. The course designs were also modified for online teaching so as to complement flipped, problem-based, and project-based learning in this new environment. Furthermore, the existing course syllabi were revised in accordance with the necessities of the online teaching mode, including extended deadlines and rearrangements.

In most of the courses, the content of the lectures was divided into two categories: asynchronous and synchronous. In the asynchronous part, the instructors were expected to prepare lecture videos or assign pre-readings, and upload them to Canvas before the class meeting time. Students were responsible for watching or reading them, and answering the content-related questions to check if they understood the subject. Both instructors and students were also welcome to post discussion notes or questions on online forums. In synchronous sessions, students and instructors met online. The online meeting session was usually handled in two parts. In the first part, the content of the topics covered in the video or pre-readings was discussed, generally in question-and-answer (Q&A) format. In the second part, various active learning approaches were applied. The students were usually divided into small groups of two to five by using the Zoom break-out-room tool. In the online break-out-rooms, students worked on questions or case studies in teams. These groups were usually randomly assigned and tended to change from meeting to meeting. Sometimes, students were allowed to choose their own groups while at other times teams were assigned prior to the meeting time. The crucial point of this format is that students had to come prepared; otherwise, they were not be able to handle the questions or case studies, which required a deeper understanding of the topic than just memorised knowledge. The online sessions often ended with individual quizzes and Q&A sessions.

To support the online teaching process, iPads were purchased for faculty members. The Pearson MyLab[18] platform was also purchased for use in class, allowing students and faculty members to access course textbooks as well as other learning materials and online assessment tools.

To communicate with students, the academic staff took advantage of various tools, such as phone calls, text messages, and videoconferences via platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and WhatsApp. Most academic departments created specific WhatsApp groups to immediately support students when issues arise.

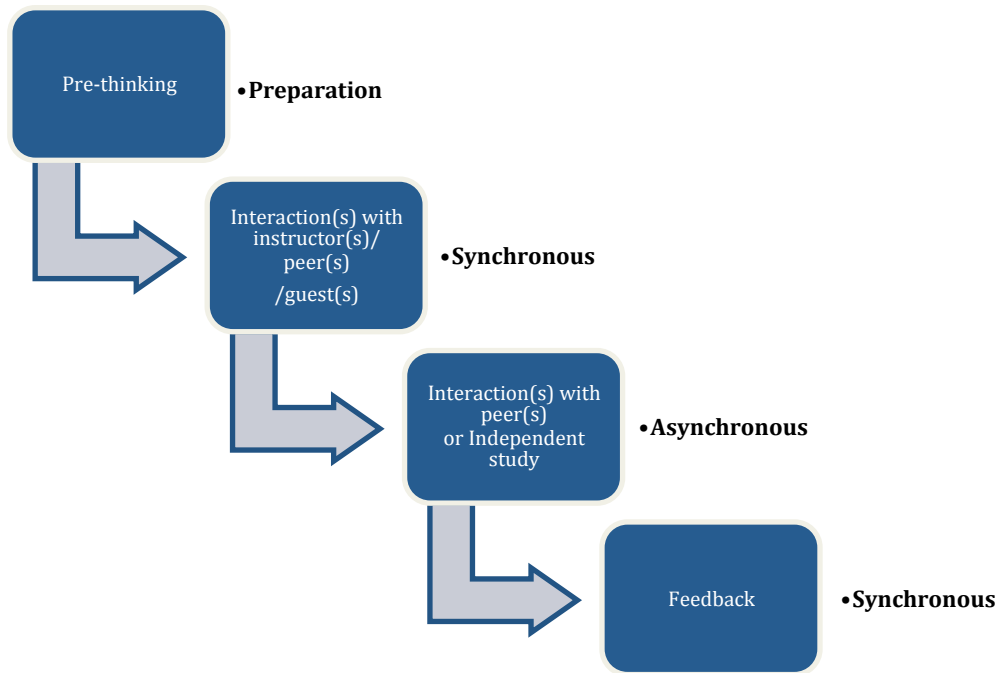[18] Pearson MyLab: A product offering collections of online homework, tutorials, and assessments.

Figure 2: The process of online teaching/learning

As for the capstone projects,[19] academic units such as the Department of Molecular Biology and Genetics and the Department Electrical and Electronics Engineering permitted students to enter the campus and use its facilities during the pandemic by taking the necessary precautions related to hygiene and social distancing. For certain projects, students were given the option to change their topic to software-based projects if necessary.

The pandemic posed a serious challenge to departments that have laboratory experiments to be performed, such as the Department of Molecular Biology and Genetics, Bioengineering and all engineering programmes. These departments started to record the experiments before classes and share their videos with the students, expecting them to analyse and interpret the data obtained during the experiment.

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[19] A capstone project is an integrative assignment that serves as an experiential learning opportunity for third or fourth-year students. Students typically work on such supervised projects in teams for one or two semesters with the aim of producing a final product, portfolio, report or presentation.

The Department of Political Science and International Relations as well as the Department of Psychology organised enjoyable and highly appreciated programme series for incoming students. These orientation programmes consisted of meetings that introduced the AGU vision, the department, the professors, and assistants.

Graduate Programmes

The AGU Graduate School of Engineering and Science effectively adapted its ways of managing and executing graduate level thesis research, mostly by transitioning to the online mode while keeping all research facilities open and available on campus. In accordance with the policies announced by the Higher Education Council (HEC), all graduate students were given the option of freezing their enrolment for one semester, effectively taking a leave of absence. They were also allowed to request the extension of the deadline to complete their graduate thesis by one semester. Based on the meetings with the Head of Graduate Programmes and faculty members, AGU allowed graduate students who had completed their courses and were doing thesis research to use on-campus research facilities and laboratories. Over 60 graduate students received approval from their thesis advisors and regularly came to the campus to use the research facilities taking the necessary measures of hygiene and social distancing. Other graduate students continued to meet with their thesis advisors online on a weekly basis.

Based on meetings with the Head of the Graduate Programmes and in line with the policies announced by the Higher Education Council (HEC), AGU developed and announced its own policies on how to conduct proficiency exams, thesis proposals, thesis defence, and exam invigilation online using Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Also, electronic signatures and remote signing were employed to minimise personal contacts/travelling. Similarly, the final presentations of the thesis projects conducted during the academic semester were performed online and were open to all graduate students and faculty members at AGU.

With all these policies and practices, the Graduate School of Engineering and Science aimed to prevent any interruptions in its effort to make significant contributions

to the advancement of science, technology, and society by maintaining state-of-the-art graduate-level research. The Graduate School of Social Sciences worked closely with students and school members to ensure continuous learning and scientific work, moving all its operations to online platforms. These operations include the organization of synchronous lectures supported by asynchronous learning activities, thesis advising, and the adoption of a system of electronic document delivery for both students and academics. In order to provide a safe working environment and physical distancing, the graduate school organised staff-rotation systems. As the Graduate School of Social Sciences is a new institution, when the pandemic started, the first students of the school were about to finalise their thesis proposals. Accordingly, the School was sure to take extra care of these students who needed constant guidance to pursue their research. Consequently, the School adopted a digital system to ensure effective communication, monitoring processes, and submission of assignments and theses (Figure 3).

Finally, for the Fall 2020 semester, the Graduate School received 36 applications. All submitted documents were shared with the admission commission members on OneDrive, allowing them to review the documents simultaneously, and thus establish knowledge about each candidate for admission. All interviews for the admission process were conducted on Zoom. Later, the registration documents of the incoming graduate students were accepted via mail.
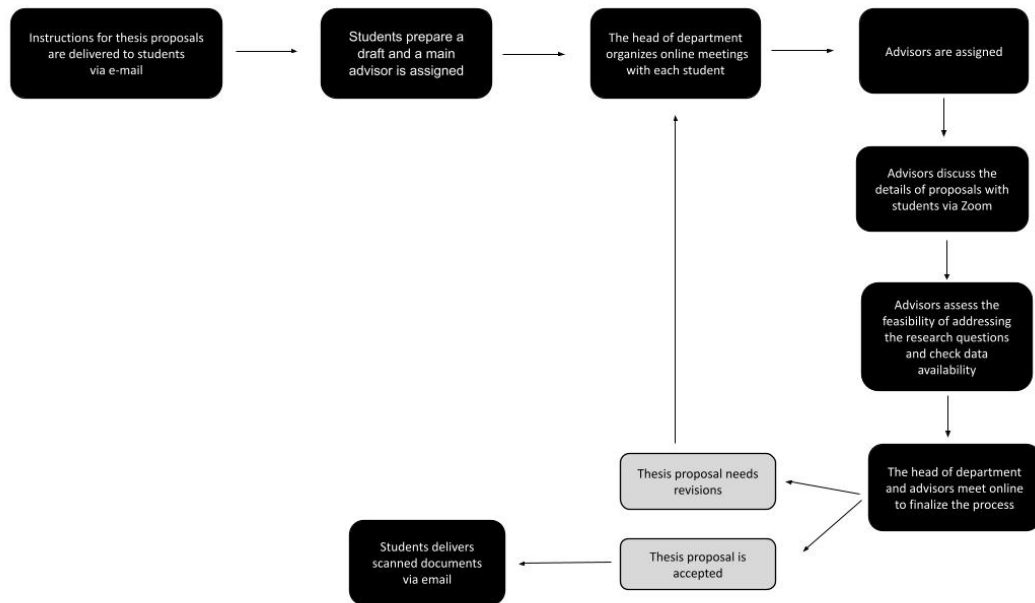
Figure 3: Adapted Digital System.

Assessment & Feedback from Students

Throughout the transition to online education, continuous assessment was reconsidered for all undergraduate, graduate, and foreign language programmes. The details and application of continuous assessment were discussed with the instructors through webinars. Instructors implemented different methods such as blogs,[20] online testing/examinations, project-based assessments with reports and presentations, oral examinations, and frequent assignment/quizzes, each of which was made to account for a low percentage of the final grade. Some also assigned grades for active participation. Rubrics, peer- and self-evaluation methodologies were also frequently used to evaluate students' progress. Online learning and course management systems such as Schoology, CANVAS, and Pearson's MyLab Platform were commonly used for assignments and assessment. Furthermore, various tools such as Zoom Poll, Sli.do,

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[20] Department of Architecture: https://arch.agu.edu.tr/agu-arch-works

Padlet,[21] Mural, and EdPuzzle[22] were used by the instructors to complement the previously-listed methods.

AGU greatly emphasised students' feedback and made sure to provide them with a platform to voice their opinions. A survey about students' needs and wellbeing was sent to the students on 27 March 2020, a couple of days after online education resumed. Additionally, focus groups and one-on-one meetings frequently took place throughout the Spring semester to monitor students' well-being and needs.

On 4 April 2020, several days after the start of the remote teaching process, another survey was conducted to evaluate students' first impressions and experiences with the online education strategy of AGU. After the assessment of these surveys by the AGU upper administration, several improvements were made to address needs that students' feedback had made evident:

- All of the course loads were reduced
- Assessment processes were redesigned for digital learning
- Students' technical problems were tolerated, and computers were provided for students in need, and grants were offered to students who needed to establish or upgrade home internet connections
- Flexible grading was introduced for all of the courses and students were given the option to change their grades from the traditional A-F scale to Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory with no effect on their overall GPA.
- Restrictions on course withdrawals were relaxed[23]
- The contact hours for synchronised sessions were reduced in half for all of the courses
- Internships during Summer School were allowed[24]

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[21] Padlet: a digital canvas that allows users to create an online notice board or post-it board.

[22] EdPuzzle: a teaching tool used to place interactive content into pre-existing videos from a variety of sources, such as TEDX or YouTube.

[23] Course withdrawals: http://www.agu.edu.tr/userfiles//Yazı%20İşleri/2020senato12.pdf

[24] Internships: http://www.agu.edu.tr/userfiles//Yazı%20İşleri/2020senato21.pdf

- Student housing continued to be available for those in need

At the end of the Spring semester, another anonymous course evaluation survey was sent out electronically to all students to collect information on their wellbeing, self-evaluation, and opinions on learning and teaching. According to the survey results, 95% of the students expressed satisfaction with the improvements that had been made based on their previous feedback. 90% expressed appreciation for the personal and professional support that was provided by the university.

Faculty Development for Remote/Online Education

AGU emphasises the importance of individuals (both academic staff and students) who learn and "produce" by sharing what they learn with society. In order to achieve this goal and strengthen its teaching and learning activities, the Centre for Learning and Teaching (CeLT) was established in 2016. Since then, the Centre has been supporting the educational activities of the university and organizing events to upskill the faculty members' pedagogical knowledge (PK) that enables instructors to transfer content knowledge (CK). When the Higher Education Council mandated institutions to immediately shift to remote education, the centre made a significant contribution to support the instructors and the students in terms of technological knowledge (TK) that was based on the TPACK[25] framework.

AGU conducted its second university-wide webinar for 400 people with the assistance of the CeLT, on 21 March2020 in order to inform the faculty members and teaching assistants about AGU's emergency remote teaching strategy and road map. In this meeting, AGU announced that the university would revise its academic calendar, use synchronous and asynchronous distance learning methods and shared preliminary information about the platforms to be used (Zoom and CANVAS). Following that meeting, the CeLT organised numerous seminars/trainings for all faculty members on various topics including engagement during online teaching and learning, technologies related to learning management, video conferencing and collaborative learning used

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[25] TPACK: Technological, pedagogical and content knowledge, http://tpack.org

during online teaching, learner-centred online education, and alternative assessment approaches during online education. CeLT also organised and led an orientation programme for the new faculty members joining AGU in the Fall 2020 semester. Several other supporting resources were also shared with faculty members throughout the semester and can be found at CeLT's website.[26]

Support Offices

AGU not only emphasises the academic development of students but also their personal, social, and cultural development. Therefore, the university conducted a meeting on 19 March 2020 with all student-supporting units. The directors and representatives from the Career Office, the Student Activities Coordinator, the Student Affairs Office, the Counselling Centre, the Youth Office, and the Centre for Learning and Teaching attended this meeting, which addressed different key topics such as new regulations about accommodation and psychological counselling services to be provided online. All concerned units adapted and continued their activities during the entire pandemic period:

Student Coordinator

The AGU Student Activities Coordinator continued to actively support students despite the Covid-19 restrictions that started in March. At the beginning of the fall 2020 semester, an online orientation programme was organised for all newly-enrolled students. For the first time, an online homecoming meeting was held for the senior students, as well. The office coordinated with other departments and committees to solve unexpected problems related to students in a timely manner.

Counselling Centre

To reduce the effect of the pandemic and to support students' adaptation to online education, the Counselling Centre provided online support to every student in need on issues such as stress management, anxiety disorder, motivation, and depression. The services provided continued during the summer semester without interruption.

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[26] CeLT website: http://celt.agu.edu.tr/faaliyetler

During the pandemic, stress, anxiety, and depression symptoms increased in the student population. Uncertainty about the changes in the education system and in students' life conditions affected their motivation. They faced more problems focusing compared to the pre-pandemic period. Students lost their family members or friends because of the pandemic.

Since March 2019, students have been able to access counselling services online to receive support psychologically and mentally. In order to deal with the increased in incidences of loss, counsellors took grief therapy courses in order to be better able to support students in mourning. To this end, both group and individual therapy were offered. To support students' adaptation to online education, the Counselling Centre provided online support to every student in need on issues such as stress management, motivation, and time management. Also, therapy approaches were adopted for game addiction and social media addiction as students were observed to spend more time in front of their computers and phones. The services provided continued during the summer semester without interruption.

Youth Factory/Erasmus Office

The AGU Youth Factory is a non-formal education resource centre for the social and personal development of youth workers, youth leaders, youth trainers, and young people. Due to its regulations and structure, the office ensures full access to everyone for its activities.

All its events and activities continued online during the pandemic. During the challenging period, the Youth Factory initiated an Online Support Programme called "Young Workshop" and organised online training entitled "Locomotive Series" on conflict management, entrepreneurship, and project management.

The Youth Factory also initiated a youth work plan supporting the volunteer activities of local NGOs and public bodies in order to help them develop in youth work. The Youth Factory also organised non-formal education training courses, leisure time activities for AGU students, and organised international symposia in the youth work.

As part of the European Voluntary Service,[27] Empowering Youth III project, the incoming volunteers organised an *online conversation club* in French, English, and Spanish. As one of the contact points of the EuroDesk[28] Youth Information Network, throughout the summer, the Youth Factory met with young people, and informed them about opportunities to join events and trainings in European countries as well as opportunities to live and work abroad,

In addition, at the time of the first cases of the outbreak, 9 AGU students were studying abroad on the European Union's Erasmus student exchange programme.[29] The Erasmus Office was in contact with them and their families on a daily basis. The Rector's Office contacted the Minister of Foreign Affairs in order to arrange a plane to Turkey, and two AGU students were successfully evacuated from Greece. The other 7 students chose to complete their exchange programs abroad and came back to Turkey during summer.

Detailed information and outcomes about Youth Factory events are attached (Appx.1).

International Office

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, The AGU International Office modified its usual processes and activities and created new ones in order to maintain the university's international operations.

The International Office intensified its communication with foreign students enrolled at AGU, collecting information daily and reporting on students' involvement in their distance-education process, their technical capacity to follow online courses, their legal residency/visa statuses, their health and mental conditions, the new Covid-19

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[27] The European Solidarity Corps, formerly known as European Voluntary Service (EVS), is an international volunteering programme by the European Commission for young people to go to another country to work for a non-profit cause.

[28] Eurodesk is a European youth information network that connects local information providers in European countries to raises awareness on European opportunities and encourages young people to become active citizens.

national and institutional rules and announcements, and many other issues related to international students.

The International Office worked on keeping international students' residency visas up to date by collecting and sharing updated information on new pandemic-related immigration procedures and by strengthening collaboration with the provincial immigration office and many Turkish consulates across the world.

The International Office usually organises intercultural activities to highlight the community's cultural diversity and to develop its members' intercultural skills. As the pandemic prevented in-person gatherings, the IO organised several online intercultural events through videoconference platforms for all AGU students.

The International Office revised its recruitment and student orientation schedules in order to meet its enrolment targets and allow incoming students to complete their visa and orientation processes on time before the beginning of classes. The 3-week "Welcome Programme" that usually includes daily gatherings, activities, and outings was completely moved online, yet still received an approval rate of 90% ("satisfied" or "very satisfied") in a student feedback survey.

Career and Professional Development Office

The AGU Career Development Office was established to support the professional development of the students. During the pandemic period, the AGU Career Centre helped the students to develop their professional skills through four different event series. The goal was to keep the events accessible to all students around Turkey. The Office opened a YouTube channel[30] where it published all online events. Detailed information and outcomes about Career and Professional Development Office events are attached (Appx. 2)

Campus Recreation Centre / Fitness Centre

Physical activity and sports are an essential part of the AGU life. However, due to Covid-19 restrictions, team games and competitions could not be performed and individual

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[30] Youtube Channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJlTzTRpFs_4o_ylL6GLsRwwhere

sports activities and competitions were held instead. Such activities[31] included basketball free-throw shooting, basketball blindfolded free throws, basketball three-point shooting, football penalty kicks, football midfield free kicks, football target shots, football keepie-uppie challenges, and tennis tournaments.

Sports tournaments were banned by the Kayseri Provincial Sanitation Board until 19 October 2020. Subsequently, AGU held several tournaments after obtaining special permissions from the Kocasinan District Governorship and the Provincial Security Directorate and applying special sanitary rules such as practicing social distancing and wearing of masks.

For the Fall 2020/2021 academic year, a hiking activity was planned for the university staff and students. The "Koramaz Valley Republic Walk" was held on 24 October 2020. Due to the pandemic, the number of the participants was limited to 20 students and 4 university staff members in order to maintain social distancing measures on the bus, which had a capacity of 45 passengers. Each attendee's HES[32] code was requested and checked.

<u>Library and Documentation Department</u>

The AGU Library and Documentation Department implemented measures that can be classified in four main categories: protection and coordination of library users, adaptation of library resources, modification of staff working hours.

For all newly registered students, the library orientation training was carried out as a Zoom presentation made to all students. Records of these trainings were also made available on the library website.

Technical support for accessing library resources remotely was provided to all users. Book return due dates were extended until 21 February 2021, to provide convenience for the library users. Students in their last semester of studied at the university were offered the opportunity to return their books using courier services.

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[31] http://www.agu.edu.tr/news/5608/BESYO's%20Republic%20Cup%20Tournaments

[32] HES codes: personal codes used in the nation-wide tracking system coordinated by the Ministry of Health. Website: https://hayatevesigar.saglik.gov.tr/hes-eng.html

An online reservation system[33] was created and put at the disposal of all AGU members willing to use the library. The usual library seating capacity of 170 people was reduced to 34 people in order to maintain social distancing. In line with this system,

- Maximum of 20 people were allowed use the library for a maximum of 2 consecutive hours
- The mezzanine floor (computerised study hall) was put into service for a maximum of 14 people to use simultaneously for a maximum of 3 hours
- The four-person desks in the library were rearranged for single users only, warning labels were posted to the unused areas of the tables, extra chairs were collected.

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[33] Reservations can be made at www.booked.agu.edu.tr and/or by phone and e-mail.

Chapter 3: Administrative Affairs

Abdullah Gul University acted proactively when the pandemic was first declared as such. The university administration foresaw that Turkey would also be confronted with this pandemic very soon and that it had the potential to severely disrupt the functioning of the institution. Hence, the AGU administration quickly took the necessary precautions to enable the continuity of education and the sustainability of academic and social activities at the institution. AGU prioritised its members' health and started to use redesigned administrative systems immediately after the first Covid-19 case was identified in Turkey.

Testing & Tracking. The university followed the protocols of the Ministry of Health for testing and tracking. Everyone entering the campus was required to submit their HES code so as to participate in the nationwide tracking system. In the event that anyone developed symptoms or tested positive for Covid-19, the university coordinated with the Kayseri Provincial Health Directorate to ensure the isolation of all who had been in contact. The relevant buildings were completely shut down for two weeks and subsequently sanitized. Likewise, when a security staff member became infected, the campus entrance where that individual had been working was closed. When a student in the dormitory became infected, their room was sanitized and shut down for two weeks and the infected student was moved to a quarantine building specifically designed for that purpose. In addition, any person with whom such an individual had been in contact was kept under careful observation. These precautions were adhered to strictly and consistently, and no on-campus transmissions of the virus are known to have occurred.

Immediate alignment with sanitary requirements information campaigns. AGU's safety and hygiene rules and criteria were redesigned. Social distancing measures were introduced while the use of masks (and sometimes gloves) was mandated. Simultaneously, enhanced campus hygiene and cleaning protocols were implemented. Detailed guidelines were prepared and communicated to students and staff. The cleaning staff received training on the new sanitary practices, such as the frequent

disinfection of surfaces, the correct use of equipment and chemicals, their storage, carriage, and labelling as well as their effects and actions in case of misuse.

Campus sanitisation. The campus heating, cooling, and ventilation systems were disinfected, and the ventilation systems were set up to supply 100% clean air. 27 hand sanitiser stations were placed on campus and refilled frequently. Sensor-fitted dryers were installed in all restrooms to avoid infection by touch. A book sterilization machine was purchased to disinfect the books in the library.

Limited and controlled on-campus presence. Working hours were adjusted and new regulations were enforced to keep the number of employees present on campus to a minimum. The university staff members who had chronic diseases and/or disabilities, who were pregnant, and who were above the age of 60 were granted a paid leave of absence, while the rest were instructed to work remotely and/or in determined flexible office hours, with meetings and training sessions held online. Taking the temperatures and verifying the HES codes of all those entering campus became standard practice.

Restructuring of the campus. The indoor areas of the campus such as the dining halls, cafeterias, offices, and classrooms were reorganised according to the social distancing standards. The library, laboratories, fitness centre, designated classrooms, and other university facilities remained available under a new regime of pandemic sanitary rules: social distancing measures, reservation systems, and the disinfection of books, laboratory tools, and inner spaces. The allocated smoking areas (2% of the campus area) were enlarged to reduce the risk of infection. Warning signs and posters (in both Turkish and English) were placed at the entrance of and inside each university office. Lane barriers were placed around desks or strategic areas used by staff to ensure compliance with social distancing rules. Elevators were reserved for disabled staff and students who were given activation cards.

Distribution of sanitary and safety equipment. 40 thousand masks were distributed to AGU staff, allowing each staff member to use three per day. The dormitory manager and assistant managers were provided with an extra mobile phone and this number was

shared with all the residence in order to ensure quicker communication with the university authorities.

Community support to fight the spread of the pandemic. At the request of the government, 6 student dormitory buildings on campus were placed at the disposal of the national Ministry of Health in case the need to house healthcare professionals arose. In addition to the 700 face shields manufactured in AGU laboratories mentioned above, the PCR devices owned by the School of Engineering and School of Life and Natural Sciences were also donated to the TUSEB Aziz Sancar Research Centre.

New transportation measures. The AGU staff in need of transportation were provided with university transportation by periodically disinfected vehicles working at 50% of their regular passenger capacity.

Accommodation of community members in need. Student dormitories were re-arranged according to the pandemic rules and sanitary measures. Foreign students who could not return to their home countries continued to be accommodated on campus. Students lacking internet access, an appropriate study environment. and/or a suitable living arrangement were also allowed to stay in student dormitories. In order to reduce the risk of transmission, students were moved so that only one student occupied one room.

Food support for community members in need. In order to minimise the risk of infection, the university cafeteria was closed. However, the small number of foreign students and students in need who stayed on campus were able to make use of the kitchens in their dormitories. Accommodation and food scholarships were granted to AGU students, while additional food was distributed to all dormitory residents by the university and by the municipality.

Maintenance of community events and activities. In addition to the International Office and the Campus Recreation Centre activities mentioned above, the AGU Youth & Fall Fest was held online and 500 students attended the event. AGU also supported the organization of 35 online student club events attended by 1250 students (Appx. 3).

<u>Adjustments to the graduation ceremony</u>. The 2020 AGU Graduation Ceremony was held on campus on 17 July 2020. Strict sanitary rules were implemented in order to keep all 110 graduating students and 350 guests safe.

Even while implementing Covid-19 specific measures, AGU continued to implement its "Zero Waste Policy" and goals and was therefore granted a "Zero Waste Certificate" by the provincial directorate of environment and urbanization.

Chapter 4: Societal Impact

As a new generation university, AGU places great importance on the sharing of knowledge and resources with local communities and society in general by helping others and preparing future generations for societal development. With this always in mind, AGU has been collaborating with national and international institutions on educational best practices and methods, as well as on the overcoming of obstacles while operating institutional transitions.

In line with this, throughout 2020, the rector shared best practices in different online events such as several Global Solutions Summit Global Tables, the Asia Technological University Network (ATU-Net UPF: "Embracing the New Norm: Leadership, Values and Skills) and also British Council's Turkey Higher Education Talks (Projections for the new academic year: How are universities preparing for the new academic year?).

The International Office Director spoke on the topic "Does a post-Covid world require new international strategies?" at the THE Live Asia Summit 2020. The CeLT Director was able to share know-how and best practices in different webinars, including one entitled "Challenges for Higher Education in the Era of Covid-19 and the Next Day," which was organised by the Hellenic International Relations Office of the Hellenic Mediterranean University, on the topics "Engagement vs Attendance in Online Teaching" and "Assessment in Online Teaching." She also met with high school students on the topic "Learning During Disruptions and Uncertainty." The Department of Architecture collaborated with Australian and other Turkish universities on the sessions entitled "Teaching Architecture and Design Online: Methods and Outcomes." AGU co-organised "Online Global Classroom: Sustainability development Goals (SDG)" sessions as part of its membership in the ATU-Net Association. Several AGU students and instructors joined different lectures and group projects organised during this 2-day course, which gathered students and lecturers from five different institutions in four different countries.

Lifelong Learning: The AGU Academy

The importance of lifelong education come to be better appreciated during the pandemic than ever before as the many changes brought about by the pandemic have made the need to upskill or reskill adults of all ages obvious. In this respect, the AGU Academy, the university lifelong learning centre, offers various courses within the context of university and industry collaboration. With the onset of the pandemic, the AGU Academy transferred all of its training/seminars to online platforms. After meeting the sanitary measures of the Turkish State and international testing companies, ETS and Collegeboard, and reducing its centre volume capacity, AGU managed to delay and then resume its international testing activities, TOEFL and SAT.

The Technology Transfer Office (TTO)

With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the AGU Technology Transfer Office (TTO) started working remotely. Entrepreneurship-based activities were carried out online for students. In 2020, the TTO received funding from a governmental institution called the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK) for the *512 Individual Youth Initiative Programme (BIGG).* BIGG information meetings and one-on-one academic mentorship activities were also organised online. In addition, the TTO continued to carry out its usual activities to support aspiring student entrepreneurs, including programmes that introduce them to mentors from the relevant industry.

University Promotion Office for Prospective Students

During the pandemic, the University Promotion Office for Prospective Students moved all of their career info sessions, in which department heads and professors speak to prospective students about academic and career opportunities, to online platforms. Moreover, the office attended several online meetings hosted by high schools located in Kayseri.

In conformity with the Covid-19 measures, the ways in which prospective students could visit the campus necessarily changed. While mass visits from local high schools were discontinued, prospective students and their families who wanted to visit

AGU during the university selection period were welcomed on campus and informed about study/career opportunities provided that social distancing and mask-wearing were practiced. Such guests were also required to make an appointment in advance. Moreover, the Office activated an "Ask Us" widget on its website for those who could not visit the campus in person.

Other Contributions

700 face shields were manufactured in the AGU laboratories and were distributed to local health organizations. The PCR devices owned by the AGU School of Engineering and School of Life and Natural Sciences were donated to the Health Institutes of Turkey (TUSEB) Aziz Sancar Research Centre.

Chapter 5: Discussions and Concluding Remarks

Prior to the pandemic, numerous Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) had already initiated a transition from face-to-face to online education with the aim of providing inclusive education for all. However, this process was quite slow; the Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the adaptation and use of online learning and teaching tools for the benefit of learners.

In contrast, we also detected a decrease in learners' ability to "learn by doing." We attribute this to the sanitary and social distancing regulations currently in place, as well as to a certain unpreparedness for change. Most HEIs were unable to transform themselves and upskill their employees and students to be competent in this new ecosystem as rapidly as the urgency of the situation called for. This crisis revealed institutions' shortcomings in terms of education and competencies, such as self-learning and self-motivation.

AGU, however, used its relatively small size as an advantage to react to the dynamic and rapidly-changing situation in a flexible manner, developing new competencies such as online collaboration and online social interaction.

This shift was obviously a challenging task to complete, since changing perspectives, approaches, teaching methods, and operational protocols requires new sets of knowledge and skills.

AGU chose to act with compassion and flexibility both for its employees and students. During this transition, AGU prioritised inclusivity and equality by listening to its stakeholders' (students, instructors, staff, and partners) needs. As a result of this dedication, AGU not only successfully transitioned to distance education, but also ranked 1st among public universities in a nationwide survey involving 18,000 students conducted by the University Assessments and Research Centre (UniAr)[34] evaluating the best transition to online education in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

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[34] Karadağ, E. & Yücel, C. (2020). Türkiye üniversite memnuniyet araştırması 2020. Uniar Yayınları.

Having gained much experience and expertise in online and off-line education practices, and having thoroughly evaluated the (dis)advantages of both, AGU has designed a new model aiming at taking the best of both worlds. This new model will require significant changes in terms of approach and philosophy to teaching, curricula, methods and tools. AGU has already planned and implemented most of these academic changes, and is ready for a launch of this model in 2021 if the health and sanitary conditions allow it.

AGU YOUTH FACTORY

COVID-19 REPORT

AGU YOUTH FACTORY

eurodesk Türkiye

WHAT IS "GENÇ ATÖLYE" ?

Genç Atölye is an Online Support Program open to all young people, particularly AGU students, where they share their experiences and interact with invited speakers. This Program continued to hold events and activities online during the pandemic.

LOCOMOTIVE TRAINING SERIES & CONVERSATION CLUBS

During the pandemic, the Youth Factory organized an online training series, called the "Locomotive Series," focusing on conflict management, entrepreneurship, and project management. All participants received an online certificate of participation at the end of the trainings. As the AGU Youth Factory, we had a youth work plan supporting the volunteer activities of local NGOs and public bodies in order to help them develop in the youth field. The Youth Factory organized Non-Formal Education Training Courses, leisure time activities, and international symposiums in the youth field for AGU students. As part of our EVS (Empowering Youth III) project, our volunteer organized online conversation clubs for French, English, and Spanish language practice.
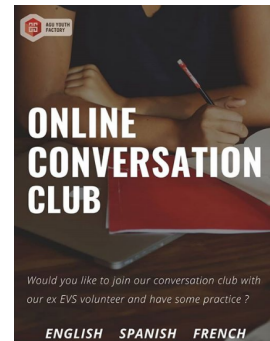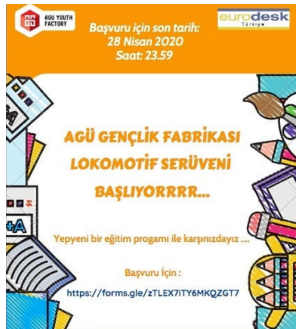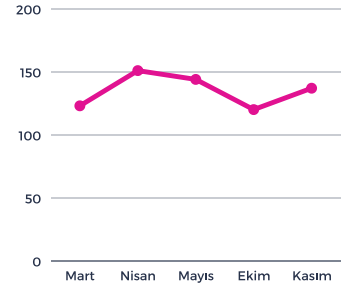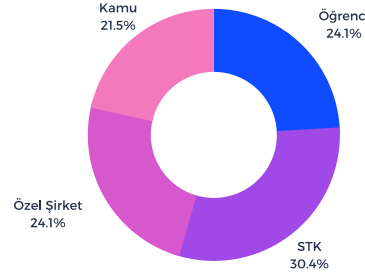
LET'S TALK WITH NUMBERS...

During COVID-19:

- 710 people signed up for events,
- 86 speakers were hosted
- 3100 people attended online events
- 9870 people were reached via social media (1300 social media views daily).

#aguyouth #eurodesk #gencatolye

Guest Profile

- Kamu 21.5%
- Öğrenci 24.1%
- Özel Şirket 24.1%
- STK 30.4%

Event Statistics

(Line chart with values ranging 0–200, categories: Mart, Nisan, Mayıs, Ekim, Kasım)

11,340

Follows us on social media
#instagram #twitter #facebook

#AGUYOUTH

Follow us
@aguyouthfactory

97%

Participant satisfaction

AGU CAREER CENTER

COVID – 19 REPORT

During the Pandemic, the AGU Career Center aimed to help the students develop their professional skills through four different series. Our goal is to keep the events accessible to all. We also opened a Youtube channel where we publish all of our online events.
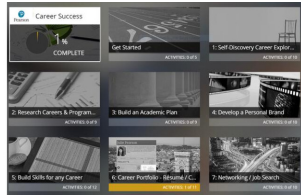
1000
Followers

22
Events

450
Daily Social Media View

800
Total Access

We cooperated with the Presidential Human Resources Office in a joint project called "Internship Mobilization" that aimed to provide extra assistance to students in finding internships considering the new challenges that arose due to the pandemic.

Pearson 4.9%
Career Talks 30.4%
CV Writing Trainings 4%
Career Gate 60.7%
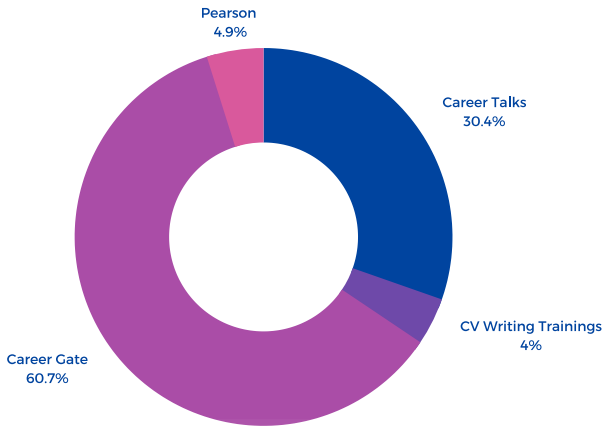
From March until the end of 2020, the Career Talks Seminar Series hosted 16 inspiring figures from different sectors online. We reached approximately 1000 students. also organized six CV-writing and interview techniques trainings online and assisted 200 students one-on-one.

We also offered a Pearson Online Career Development Program where the students worked on their professional profiles, earning globally-recognized badges for the skills-based modules completed. Using this platform, the students were able to exercise self-exploration and receive feedback from the Career Center professionals.