

## Lowering the price of tuition – a just necessity in the age of online learning

The beginning of the new academic year and the identification of the tendency to decide to carry out teaching activities exclusively in the online environment for some study programs draws attention to tuition fees and the justification of their amount. In the context in which the teaching activity will take place online and implicitly of the modification of the specific costs of the program, the National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania (ANOSR) asks universities to clearly present to students the mechanisms by which tuition fees are established.

In Romanian higher education, universities can admit to studies over the amount of places financed from the state budget, students who agree to bear the tuition costs from their own resources, and the related tuition fee is established at the university Senate level according to the specific costs of schooling.

However, according to OMECTS no. 3666/2012 on the approval of the Code of Student Rights and Obligations (CDOS), art. 15, "Students have the right to know the mechanisms by which tuition fees are established". With the sudden change in the facts, it is necessary to establish the tuition fee in relation to the new reality, the fee identified by the university as adequate to the study program in relation to the related costs (as provided by Emergency Ordinance No. 133/2000 on The state university and postgraduate education with fee, over the places financed from the state budget in article 3), as well as the evaluation of the student on the relationship between the fee and the services offered have undergone changes since the decision.

In the context of activities carried out entirely online, students no longer benefit from the material base offered by the university, starting with the services of university libraries, study rooms, laboratory materials and even sports bases. At the same time, the costs of universities related to overheads, maintenance and household expenses are considerably reduced.

In view of the obvious change in the structure of universities' expenditure on study programs, it is necessary to re-evaluate them, recast them in relation to the projected expenditures for the first semester, consult with student organizations, student representatives and inform students on how to reduce expenditures.

However, the reduction of the tuition fee in the context of online education must also be seen in the light of the financial difficulties of students whose families are financially affected by the economic crisis generated by the pandemic. Their support is a key point in combating the phenomenon of university dropout that has been present for a long time in the field of higher education and accentuated by the economic crisis. A failure of higher education institutions to respond appropriately to the demands of the pandemic context in all its complexity would result in significant losses for society as a whole.

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Taking responsibility for the university community requires the implementation of an effective plan to support students. Thus, after reflecting on the realistic decrease in services provided, we believe that the only alternative solution to lower tuition fees is to approve an investment plan in digital educational resources accessible to students, coupled with the creation of additional support mechanisms for students.

"University heads should present to students who, according to the decisions taken in the last days, will learn at least part of the first semester in an exclusively online formula, the measures proposed to increase the number and quality of resources offered compared to the experience of the second semester for the academic year 2019-2020. One certainty is related to the decrease of some cost components and the decrease of the access to the services that were previously available, aspects that in the absence of ample, effective and useful alternatives for the students should lead to the decrease of the tuition fee. Although it is not a surprise that most of the expenses are related to the salary expenses component, a decrease of the tax demonstrates the application of a principle and the awareness of the students' situation" - said Horia-Șerban ONIȚA, president of ANOSR.

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