

# Teaching and Learning International Relations in the Pandemic of COVID-19: challenges, proposals and results

*Ensino e Aprendizagem de Relações Internacionais na Pandemia de COVID-19: desafios, propostas e resultados*

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Since 2000, the field of International Relations has undergone great expansion in Brazil with the support of flexible regulations, increased public investment and the growing interest of public opinion in the subject. From 2002 to 2020, 27 new programs were created in Brazilian public universities in all regions of the country. However, most of these institutions were not prepared for distance education, and were seriously affected. Moreover, this emergency context hit Brazil in the midst of a political-economic crisis, which was aggravated by socioeconomic, health, organizational and technical-operational factors. As a consequence, most of these institutions had to abruptly discontinue their teaching activities.

While the private entities outlined a scenario of rapid implementation of the education digitalization plan, suffering financial pressures due to default and mass layoffs of professors, the public higher education institution (HEIs) offered three different types of response, faced with the alternatives within their three areas of activity: teaching, research, and extension. In some cases, transitioning to the remote context revealed challenges far greater than access to the Internet, including the very survival of teachers and students. Besides the human losses, the pandemic was a source of professional interruptions for higher education in Brazil. Even so, in the midst of this complex context, professors have sought to adapt and create new teaching and evaluation methodologies

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and techniques, with the objective of minimizing the losses in the teaching-learning process.

COVID-19 has affected teaching and learning in almost every HEI in the world. Marinoni et al (2020) estimate that two-thirds of HEIs have implemented distance education. In March 2020, the beginning of the academic semester in most HEIs in Brazil was surprised by the need for in-person suspension of teaching activities. Until then intended only for Distance Education (DE), digital learning has spread throughout the Brazilian educational system in different modalities, such as remote learning, different from the original concept of distance education. In the specific case of higher education, digital activities and the use of virtual learning environments have been adopted as a way to replace in person activities.

This was done in an emergency way, without any training of teachers, especially those who were not familiar with remote teaching. The challenge was there: to learn how to use new digital tools, for which a vast majority of the teaching staff had done little or no work before, but, above all, to reinvent themselves in face of this "new normal". It should also be mentioned that students were not trained either. Moreover, the transition to digital media has accentuated an already existing gap, especially for students who do not have the financial or geographical conditions to have access to the internet.

We suppose remote teaching, although it has been installed in an improvised and emergency way, has significantly impacted the teaching and learning process. In this scenario, Mettrica Lab (Laboratory of Methodologies and Techniques for Active Learning in IR) understands that it has a key role in the construction and dissemination of pedagogical practices compatible with remote teaching which can be employed also in in-person teaching.

Therefore, the dossier brings together contributions that contextualize these challenges of the transition to the remote modality in a critical political-economic context, such as possibilities and paths for teachers to adapt their teaching styles in disruptive contexts, considering conjunctural challenges, such as access and use of technologies in teaching, engagement, and structural ones, considering socioeconomic and emotional issues that have gained evidence in this context, permeating teaching activities. We also present some experiences of active learning methodologies developed to be applied in the remote context, aiming to overcome the challenges of engagement and other difficulties

related to teaching mediated by digital platforms. Some of these experiences have been designed, applied, and tested within the Mettrica Lab, also virtually. This allowed us to identify improvement opportunities in order to make them more interesting and effective.

The dossier is composed of five papers that bring different, although complementary, views in theoretical-methodological, institutional and geographical terms, but all with a reflective and propositional perspective, as far as possible, of the challenges imposed on the teaching of international relations from the experience of COVID-19.

The first work, prepared by Lais Kuss (Fecap) Cristina C. Pacheco (UEPB) presents a mapping of the transition to the remote context in institutions in the Northeast of the country: "From face-to-face to remote: mapping the transition of Northeastern International Relations courses to COVID-19 social isolation".

Isabel R. Siqueira of (PUC-RJ) and Nycolas Candido discusses one of the biggest challenges of remote learning, engagement, with the reflection, "What does it mean to be present in the process of distance learning? Reflecting on learning during the pandemic?"

Augusto Teixeira (UFPB), Elia Cia Alves (PGPCI, UFPB) and Cristina C. Pacheco (UEPB) present an active teaching experience in international security studies with "The Teaching Case in the Remote Context: the experience of Geopolitics and International Security discipline"

João Paulo Pereira (PPGCPRI, UFPB), Artur Egito (PPGPCI, UFPB), Letícia Montenegro (PPGRI, UEPB) and Elia Cia Alves (PGPCI, UFPB) bring a reflection about public policies employing a free and interactive platform "Decarbonise! An online game-simulation experience on decarbonization climate policies"

Jan Marcell (UFT), Fernando Ludwig (UFT) and Italo Sposito (UFT) contribute with their experience of the transition from a simulation model to the online context, in "Simulations in International Relations (SimulaRI): a pedagogical innovation project for a virtual simulation at UFT".

## **References**

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