



Scholarship recipient, Maria Ines, who is a second-year Industrial Organization student at Universidad Tecnologica Nacional, tells us about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on her school life.

### University goes virtual

With the global pandemic, my life at university changed completely. I returned home a few days before the Argentine government announced a mandatory, indefinite, stay-at-home order, my classes were cancelled, and the uncertainty started to grow. The Universidad Tecnologica Nacional (UTN) where I am a sophomore tried to make the right decisions as soon as possible. At first, it was clear that classes would be offered online. Students and professors had to adapt quickly to learn about working remotely and to get familiar with new tools that would allow us to do so. Personally, I had to manage with the school notes I had taken with me when I came home, and I had to get used to attend classes virtually while sharing a space with my family 24/7, trying to keep up with my school responsibilities and minimizing distractions.

UTN kept the same class schedule as before, and introduced tools like Zoom, Jitsi.meet, Google classroom, Gmail, Drive, and UTN virtual campus. It was a learning process for us all, students and professors.

As for ways to do exams in this new environment, it depends on each class and professor. Some have taken exams on the UTN virtual system, while others decided to postpone exams until we can take them in person. As the pandemic progressed, and some areas of Argentina have been able to control its spread, stay-at-home measures have been relaxed. In the last week of June, UTN has allowed in-person exams, always taking prevention methods of social distancing and the use of face masks and hand sanitizer. Classrooms will be open for a limited time every day, and there is a limit in the number of people allowed in a building. They also issued permits for the use of labs, with a maximum occupancy of four people at a time.

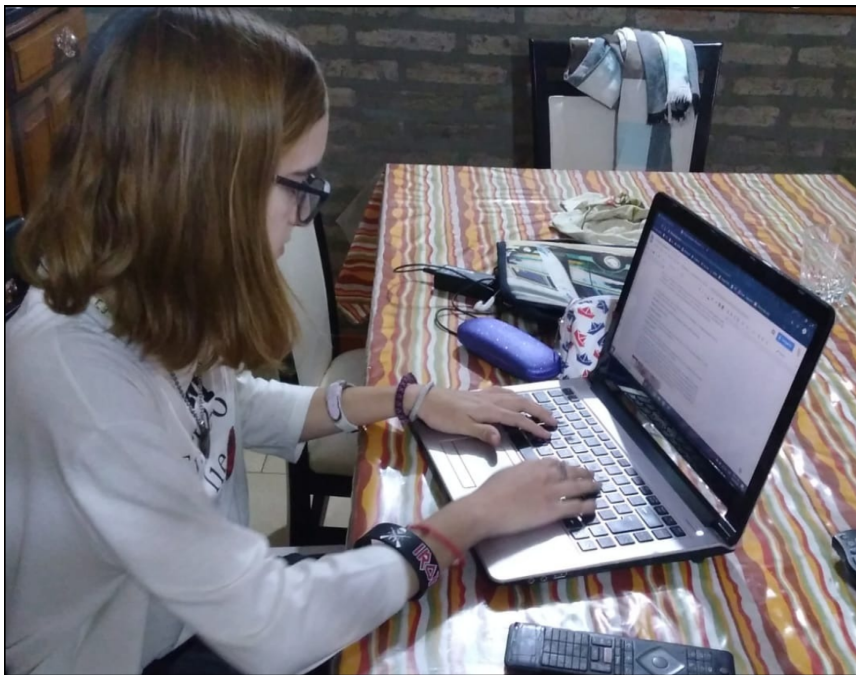


Another area that UTN had to modify was related to scholarships. I was awarded a UTN scholarship that required service hours in the Physics lab. Given the current situation, I am able to fulfill this requirement with remote work. We attend two weekly meetings where scholars and staff discuss objectives and define the work that can be done remotely.

Without these adaptations to the way we study and work, our 2020 academic year would have been cancelled, but thanks to technology and everyone's willingness to find a solution, we continue our activity despite quite an extraordinary set of circumstances.

On the other hand, there are some disadvantages to this virtual learning situation, like issues with connectivity (many households in Argentina do not have high-speed internet), misunderstandings that may happen for not having a conversation face-to-face, or teaching methods that are not the most effective.

In conclusion, being behind a computer screen is not the same as being in the classroom. In my perspective, these online tools and virtual methods are helpful in extreme situations, but they will never replace human contact and face-to-face communication.



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Gabriela

