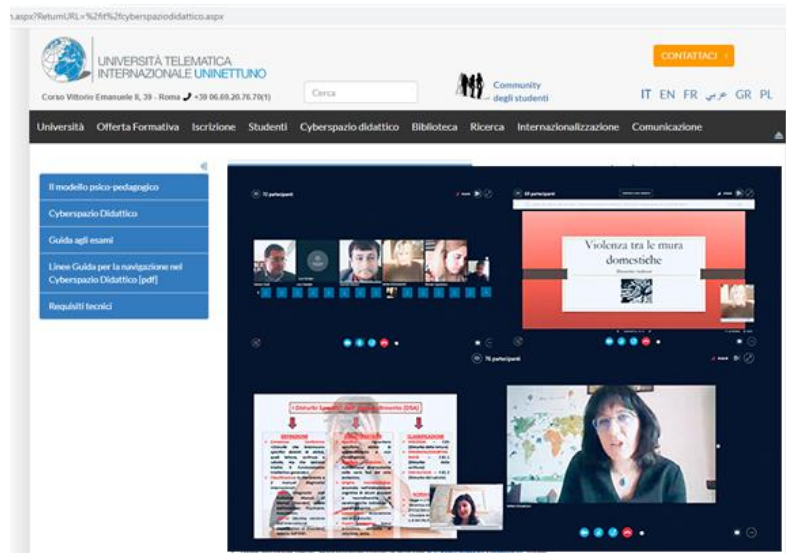# Graduating at the Time of Coronavirus

Sara's story, among the first ones to discuss her thesis online in the Interactive Classrooms of the International Telematic University UNINETTUNO

The spreading of coronavirus in Italy does not stop the achievement of a dream for many Italian students: get a degree after years of work and study

Rome, the 17th March 2020 - "*I discussed my thesis and I felt surrounded by a warm, virtual hug, by the family of my University. Even if they chose the distance mode to discuss the graduation theses, the emotions were very strong all the same. I thank the Rector, all the Professors, the Dean's Office and the IT staff for having faced this enormous difficulty with great sensitivity and in a professional manner. They gave me courage. I was very worn down by this damned virus that hit my father, my rock*"**.** These are the sincere and moved words of **Sara Merenda**, aged 29, who lives in Formia (Latina, Italy) and who has just graduated in **Cognitive Processes and Technologies** at the **International Telematic University UNINETTUNO**. **"***At present, with the due treatments* – she continues – *my father is getting better day after day. He is strong and obstinate. I am looking forward to seeing him back home to celebrate my 110 with honors, which he wished so much. Everything will be all right***!"**

On the 12th and 13th March 2020, twenty-two candidates of the Psychology Faculty of the UNINETTUNO University had the possibility of discussing their graduation theses online through Interactive Classrooms, implemented for this purpose by the University for this new discussion mode in this period of nation-wide emergency: https://www.uninettunouniversity.net/it/svolgimento-tesi-via-classi-interattive.aspx.

In the Interactive Classrooms, available in UNINETTUNO's Didactic Cyberspace, set up for all the Faculties, the lecturers members of the Graduation Commission, jointly with the candidates started and completed the works of discussion of the theses, implementing **an online process that was designed, tested and simulated during the previous days**: presentation of the candidate; control of his identity by submission of a document; discussion of the thesis with aid of PowerPoint slides; comments of the Commission; communication of the grade by the chairperson of the Commission; request of acceptance of the grade by the candidate; final declaration.

The discussion from remote saw the participation of **over 80 connected people** on average; **among them also the students' friends and relatives.**

An emotion shared on the Web, based on a technological and organizational methodology made possible thank to the organizational, psycho-pedagogic and didactic models of UNINETTUNO, acknowledged by the International Scientific Community and outcome of the work done in over 30 years of research conducted by the Rector, **Prof. Maria Amata Garito,** and by her team.

"The interactive classrooms allowed us to consolidate and put to good use our learning. A "liquid" learning that, in spite of the hard times we are experiencing and the distance that separates us at a physical level, keeps us united as a sea." (**Anita Carloni, newly graduated Doctor in Psychosocial Discipline at UNINETTUNO)**

"The success gained with the first graduations discussed online is really very important since, in a gloomy time as the present one, we brought a bit of joy and cheerfulness in the homes of some of our students. Seeing their posts on the social networks, in their homes, while they celebrate the event with their relatives, with the red candies on their thesis, the makeshift laurel wreaths and the virtual hug and participation of their colleagues, friends and relatives who were able to follow all the discussion from remote, was, for me, a moment of great happiness. In these days of loneliness at home, I conducted some research work to see how to use technologies in the interactive classrooms with new models of processes and procedures linked to the discussion of the theses and delivery of the exams online. Looking at the results of these hours, once again we were able to prove that it is not enough to have a more or less advanced platform to realize a valuable distance teaching system; technology has to be at the service of the aim we want to achieve and not the contrary. We, at UNINETTUNO, have been doing so and this is the success of our model. Distance teaching cannot be carried out on the spur of the moment. Of course, my research activities in this field would have been useless if I wouldn't have had all UNINETTUNO's staff by me, not only the IT ones that worked relentlessly to post the new models on the online learning environments, to train the secretariats and the teachers, but also all the technical and administrative area in identifying the new rules to be adopted and all the teaching staff who, since the beginning, has been willing to learn new ways of using our distance learning environments." (**Prof. Maria Amata Garito**, **Rector of UNINETTUNO)**.

"As a member of the Commission in the graduation session, I was very satisfied with what we were able to do and also admired my colleagues technicians and lecturers for the accurateness

with which they tried, simulated and then implemented all the processes identified by Professor Garito and by the team who put in place this new procedure. Being able to answer the wish of the students to achieve their objective in time, even those connected from areas that have been hardly hit by this emergency and seeing them rejoice and be moved has been very touching." (**Prof. Alessandro Caforio**, Head of Research and Innovation at UNINETTUNO)

Thanks to the use of the new technologies, **UNINETTUNO** keeps on giving hope to Italy at the time of coronavirus: **beside the discussion of the theses, the students will be able to take their exams also online,** being guided by the teachers and by the technical staff who will assure their organization support and the technological tools to overcome also this challenge too at our best.

With the objective of making the Web, a "Web of Humanity", the **University has also made available for free technologies, contents and know-how to support the Italian Universities in this period of emergency.** A choice and a responsibility that confirms the University's mission: democratizing the access to knowledge to build a **Better World**.