


“Sustaining academic commitment under adverse circumstances and adapting to new roles during the year of war: Example of Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University”

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SPECIAL ISSUE: ACADEMIC MANAGEMENT IN THE CONDITIONS OF WAR

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SUSTAINING ACADEMIC COMMITMENT UNDER ADVERSE CIRCUMSTANCES AND ADAPTING TO NEW ROLES DURING THE YEAR OF WAR: EXAMPLE OF LESYA UKRAINKA VOLYN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Abstract

The full-scale russia-Ukraine war, which started in February 2022, created severe challenges in every domain throughout the country, including that of higher education. Therefore, educational authorities' response to this crisis has become interesting and significant. The goal of this study is to highlight the experience of Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University, exemplifying potential reactions to this new situation, analyzing the university's overall structure and functioning, in particular, its continuing dedication to its long-term academic role while implementing crisis management measures during the martial law.

The asynchronous teaching mode and unique linkages with LUVNU students and teachers residing outside the country illustrated the university's commitment to its educational role. At the same time, staff and students of the university demonstrated their capacity to take on a totally new role, seeking ways to support the military and various population groups suffering from the full-scale invasion. This flexibility was reflected in a wide range of specific projects undertaken by different entities within the university, demonstrating their ability to devise initiatives that corresponded in some manner to their original field of study in the university, whether it be for the manufacture of specialized items or the opening up of personal support structures.

Keywords university, education, military, support, development

JEL Classification M14, I23, J28

INTRODUCTION

When russia's bombardments and attacks of February 24, 2022, signaled the violent onset of war, there was widespread confusion and panic in Ukraine. People across the country were in shock and had to begin adapting to life with the constant anxiety of listening for air-raid sirens. At that moment, it was impossible to foresee that the year to follow would be a crucial one in the nation's history. This year is marked by events that no one could ever have imagined taking place in the 21st century; it has drastically changed the country and its people; it has also changed the world as a whole and has simultaneously created a totally new image of Ukraine and its people in the eyes of the international community. Ukrainians have shown courage and unity while fighting fiercely to defend their homeland and refusing to abandon their hope of ultimately achieving victory.

In this intense and critical period, there have been significant changes in how the country is administered and substantial changes in the management patterns of various institutions, including universities. When the war broke out, universities in every region of Ukraine were drastically impacted. This study focuses on one example – Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University (LUVNU).

The Volyn oblast is fortunately in a relatively peaceful situation, as far as the war is concerned. The university can function more or less normally in its classroom buildings, all equipped with shelters where students and staff can take refuge whenever an air raid siren sounds. But, of course, it is impossible to predict what may happen in the future, as the war is ongoing. Volyn's geographical location adjacent to the Polish border is one factor that could contribute to this relative peacefulness. Still, at the same time, there is an element of danger because Belarus lies on its northern border.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the activities of LUVNU and its crisis management during the full-scale invasion in 2022, using it as an example of the crisis management that can be adopted by other institutions under such circumstances.

1. RESULTS

1.1. LUVNU before the Russian invasion

Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University (LUVNU) is one of the oldest educational institutions and one of the two largest educational establishments in Volyn Oblast, extending back to 1940. As of February 24, 2022, the university encompassed 15 faculties. It also comprised the Educational and Scientific Physical and Technological Institute, the Postgraduate Education Teaching and Research Institute, the Preparatory Department, and the College of Technology, Business, and Law. In addition, 67 chairs of faculties, along with the professional academic staff, were working at LUVNU.

Establishing links with educational institutions and agencies abroad has been a high priority for LUVNU for several years. As a result, it is a member of the European University Association (being a signatory of the Magna Carta of Universities at the University of Bologna, Italy, in 2022), the International Association of Universities (IAU), the Eastern-European University Network, the Baltic-Ukrainian Academic Consortium, the Consortium of Ukrainian universities and the University of Warsaw, and the Cross-Border Innovation Cluster. In addition, LUVNU has double-degree diploma programs under the auspices of the Polish-Ukrainian Program with AGH University of Science and Technology, the Jan Długosz University

in Częstochowa, the University of Economics and Innovation in Lublin, the University of Warsaw, and the Lithuanian-Ukrainian Program with Vytautas Magnus University.

Based on its outstanding performance, the institution entered the Top-25 in terms of the Consolidated Ranking of Ukrainian universities in 2022 and the Top-450 in the ranking of the best universities in the world – QS EECU University Rankings. This illustrates significant progress and recognition: these ratings confirm the high level of effectiveness in education, science, and international activities carried out by the teaching and administrative staff and the students.

1.2. LUVNU after the Russian invasion

Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University (LUVNU) was drastically affected right from the initial days of the war. It had to abruptly change its operating mode, switching to an asynchronous training mode. In an atmosphere of constant pressure, the university held a period of short holidays, as mandated by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. Many teachers and students left the country just after the full-scale war began, especially those with children. At the beginning of March 2022, the academic process resumed, and the university once again took up its primary mission of providing classes for its students.

The switch of the educational process to online mode was accomplished successfully. The staff

supported the students who were staying in dormitories, and teachers who were abroad were permitted to remain there and conduct their classes online. This strategy served as a tremendous source of support and understanding from and within the staff. Maintaining the mental health of citizens in all spheres is a vital priority for a society to prosper. Although it has been challenging to preserve it satisfactorily during wartime, the university has successfully tackled this issue.

Before the start of the new academic year, the primary task was to restore and equip shelters at campus premises for students and staff as the university set out to implement its policy of resuming in-person instruction. Achieving success, LUVNU is now offering in-person classes for undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate, and doctoral students. Actually, it might be termed a blended system, as students abroad can also study offline, thanks to the resources provided by Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom, and Moodle. In addition, eleven teachers have been allowed to undergo an internship in some leading international educational institutions, and they are also able to work online.

The LUVNU community currently consists of more than ten thousand students in total. During the past three years, there has been an increase in net enrollment (Table 1). In terms of degree programs, there has been an increase in all educational levels over the past three years. A dramatic increase can be seen at the master's level in 2022 – by 897 more than in 2021. This can be accounted for by the fact that in 2022 the only entrance test – the test in a foreign language – was canceled. For prospective students who wanted to enter the university the year before or in 2021 but who had failed the test in a foreign language, this meant they could enter the university in 2022. As a result, the number of enrolled students in the bachelor's degree program grew by 278 compared to 2021. There has also been an increase in the percentage of Ph.D. students. The overall growth of enrolled students can also be explained by the fact that LUVNU is situated in a relatively peaceful area and offers an offline work format during its entrance campaign. However, a certain number of students were expelled at their own request, having decided to leave Ukraine. Even though the actual percentage in this category is not very substantial, it is still a

concern because, in terms of Ukraine's long-term future, any loss of human resources is apt to have a negative impact on the nation's reconstruction and renewal.

Table 1. Enrollment during the academic years from 2020 to 2022

Degree	2020	2021	2022
Bachelor's	1634	1985	2263
Master's	1013	1000	1897
Ph.D.	53	59	109
Total	2700	3044	4269

It should also be mentioned that there are more fully-subsidized places for students in the bachelor's and master's degree programs because military personnel or their children can benefit from being in preferential categories.

As of January 1, 2022, the total number of staff members was 1322, including 739 teachers; as of January 1, 2023, the total has dropped to 1257, including 740 teachers in various positions: lecturers, senior lecturers, associate professors, and professors. Fortunately, the number of teaching staff has hardly changed, and the staff members can receive their salaries; the students likewise receive their scholarships. In addition, teachers are incentivized through a rating system and the payment of bonuses to the university's best teachers in terms of their performance.

The development of international initiatives in 2022 has continued:

- the university won the following Erasmus+ Jean Monnet projects: Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence "Volyn Centre for European Studies: Green and Secure Neighbourhood"; Jean Monnet Module "Fostering Academic Integrity and Responsibility: EU Policy"; Jean Monnet Module "Developing European Framework for Action on Mental Health and Well-Being;"
- five projects have been implemented with the support of NAWA (Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange) in culture and language studies;
- partnership agreements were signed with prominent universities: McMaster University

in Canada, University of Rennes II in France, Wesleyan University (USA), and Anglia Ruskin University (United Kingdom). It also became possible to extend partnerships with Polish institutions: the School of Personnel Management, the Warsaw School of Economics (SGH), and the Medical University of Lublin.

Concerning the Erasmus+ program, student mobility for LUVNU students increased by 17% compared to the 2021–2022 academic year. In addition, single-semester mobility has risen by 13% by comparison with the 2021–2022 academic year, as more places were provided by university partners, and the students could remain abroad at the partner universities.

1.3. LUVNU's contribution to the fight

From the very outset of the war, LUVNU transformed its priorities and began directing assistance toward the military. As a result, along with the duties the staff had already been performing, they dealt with several new areas that emerged as being critically important. Each structural unit of the university selected a sphere where it could assist military personnel and/or their families and internally displaced people. This support still takes many different forms, the most significant ones being the following:

- production of various items by university employees and students;
- organization and participation in charity events supporting the armed forces and internally displaced people, including students;
- military and practical training of the general public;
- psychological assistance for military personnel and the public; and
- campaigns to debunk fakes and undertake various information front initiatives.

Each faculty in the university was able to identify a specific area in which it could offer potential benefit for the war effort and/or the country as a whole

(Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c). This demonstrates the soundness of the university's development strategy and the degree of improvement in the staff, giving evidence of the professionalism of the staff members, who were able to alter their focus from theoretical to practical problems and contribute to the country as a whole. Furthermore, the staff's practical accomplishments illustrate the university's high status and its leading role in Ukrainian society.

From the first days of the war up to the present, students, and staff of the Educational and Scientific Physical and Technological Institute have been involved in systematic production activity for the manufacture of tourniquets, which have been conveyed to military units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. They have also designed and manufactured solar panels, autonomous charging modules for power banks, smartphones, tablets, and other equipment for the defenders of Ukraine; some structural elements are created using a 3D printer. Moreover, an inverter was developed and manufactured at LUVNU. Inverters are essential for supporting military personnel and civilians in combat zones, basements, shelters, dug-outs, tents, or checkpoints.

Since the beginning of the full-scale war, the Chemistry, Ecology, and Pharmacy Faculty has been producing about 50 types of ointments for the needs of military volunteers, including those for treating wounds, burns, sickness, and fungal infections. Students also contributed to the military defensive process by weaving camouflage nets for armed forces personnel.

LUVNU is also involved in the "information war," as mentioned briefly above; it developed a software tool designed to protect national information resources and critical infrastructure. In addition, some lectures and discussions on information security and information hygiene, countering fakes and disinformation, and preventing fear-mongering and panic have also been held. University students have also countered fakes and propaganda on various social media platforms and resources. The Foreign Philology Faculty has launched several vital translation projects.

The university has purchased various essential items for the military or facilitated the conveyance

of such items donated by volunteers. Through the consistent work of the university staff, the military forces are receiving ongoing support, especially the Volyn brigades. In connection with this, a supply of personally-delivered burners and gas cylinders was arranged to help keep the personnel warm in combat zones. In addition, four Starlinks and a supply of binoculars were contributed.

Since the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion, Lutsk has become a key center for internally displaced people. In close cooperation with partners from Poland, France, Italy, and Switzerland, LUVNU managed to organize the collection and transfer of humanitarian aid for those who need it most urgently. Thanks to international relations links, the university systematically coordinates the transport of humanitarian aid to be provided to the military as well as to internally displaced persons. Their contributions include food, medicine, bandages, and other urgent necessities, including bedding, blankets, rugs, and hygiene items.

Within the framework of cooperation with the Good Deed Charitable Foundation, the university received volunteer assistance to improve the living conditions of students from the temporarily occupied territories living in dormitories 2 and 3. The campus where the internally displaced people settled received humanitarian aid from the Rokada Charitable Foundation. The university received 2.3 tons of goods from AES Alsace intended for setting up facilities on the campus, which was temporarily turned into a location for receiving IDPs, as well as for military personnel of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and for civilians.

At the end of March 2022, the Faculty of Philology and Journalism opened a Ukrainian Language Conversation Club for internally displaced people from regions where active hostilities are still underway. Also, for their benefit, two faculties assisted the Department of Youth and Sports of the Lutsk City Council in organizing a family leisure club for children, and the Faculty of International Relations initiated therapeutic art classes.

The University staff organized and participated in a number of charity campaigns, such as "Bringing Victory Closer," "Let's Protect Our Border," "Bold Hryvnia," "Patrons for Soldiers," a charity mi-

ni-football tournament, and a charity quest dedicated to the Family Day in the Old Town (Lutsk); all of these campaigns were conducted to raise funds. One of the events made it possible to buy Garmin GPS trackers and a thermal imager to strengthen the defenses on the Belarus border by providing necessary items and many other essential goods.

Public members have needed to receive instruction in various aspects of self-defense. Therefore, on July 8, 2022, a multimedia firing range was opened at the Law Faculty. In addition, a course called "Effective Ownership and Handling of Weapons" was launched. It includes 33 hours of studying the legal aspects of owning weapons; civilian security; fire, tactical, military medical, physical training; military topography, and communication security. Public groups are constantly engaged in this instruction program, and it has gained high popularity.

Acknowledging the need to provide psychological and moral support to military personnel and their families, the university opened a "Plus Plus++" facility on September 12, 2022, offering psychological assistance. The project is being implemented within the framework of the "Plus Plus++" Veteran Hub partnership program. In addition, at the initiative of the Faculty of Psychology, the university held training sessions on psychological support for Ukrainian volunteers working with children.

Since March 2, 2022, in view of the critical circumstances resulting from the invasion, the Ukrainian Center for Psychotrauma and the Psychology Faculty have been providing free psychological support to the population on the Zoom platform and through group and individual consultations.

Amid so much turmoil and disruption caused by the war, the university has now demonstrated its capacity to adapt to a wide variety of circumstances and to maintain its commitments in the various areas which have already been referred to above. This involves:

- effective educational process;
- strategies for making more efficient use of digital options for paperwork operations within all the faculties;

- initiatives to strengthen links and partnership agreements with foreign centers of learning; and
 - undertakings connected with preserving the mental health of individuals inside and outside the university community.
- Thus, there are ample reasons for optimism concerning the future of LUVNU. Moreover, many practical initiatives, implemented by members of various faculties for protecting lives or dealing with health and development issues, have shown successful outcomes to confirm the soundness of the university's planning and approaches.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this study was to present an overview of the functioning of LUVNU since the outbreak of full-scale war as compared to its pre-war patterns and to examine the broad range of initiatives that have been launched since the Russian invasion of February 2022, in response to unprecedented and unexpected catastrophic events. LUVNU has the good fortune of being located in a comparably peaceful area. As of March 2023, no university buildings or facilities have been subjected to bombing or shelling, making it possible for classroom instruction and other academic activities to be conducted in person, more or less as they were before the war. This has also enabled teachers involved in internship programs to carry out their work without major hindrances.

Even under the most difficult conditions experienced since Ukraine gained its independence, this year of the war saw LUVNU make some substantial gains. There has been a notable increase in the number of partnership agreements and students who have chosen LUVNU as the center of learning where they wish to be enrolled and pursue their studies.

The university provides active support and assistance to the Armed Forces of Ukraine, family members of military personnel, and internally displaced persons by means of a broad range of initiatives.

From February 2022 up to February 2023, LUVNU has succeeded in being faithful to its academic mission to provide education for those who thirst for knowledge and want to utilize it in real-life situations.

However, the painful circumstances of war have made it possible for the faculties and institutes to actually carry out specific practical initiatives that illustrate the true value of what they have always sought to offer in a theoretical manner to the degree that would not be possible in more peaceful times. This confirms that when the correct type of development takes place, it can make it possible for individuals to work together as a united entity for the good of their country and their society, not merely as passive observers. This illustrates the actual value of the university's mission and vision.

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