

From planning to implementation: How the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine is building a digital future

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Abstract. *This extended abstract outlines the digital transformation process at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine University of Zagreb. Guided by the institution's strategic framework (2023–2027), the Faculty has implemented various digital tools and policies, particularly in the area of teaching. The case study is based on institutional documents, strategic frameworks, and informal consultations with staff. Key developments include the establishment of the Office for e-learning, participation in national digitalization projects, and the creation of open-access educational materials. A concrete example—the digitization of histological slides—illustrates how strategic goals are implemented in practice. The paper also discusses future challenges related to AI integration in higher education.*

Keywords. e-Universities, digitalization, Office for e-learning

1 Introduction

The digitalization process at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Zagreb, follows trends, as evident in the guidelines of the Development Strategy of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of the University of Zagreb in the period 2023–2027 (*The Faculty of Veterinary Medicine*, 2022). The Strategy predicts the introduction or improvement of digital processes in all areas of work: educational and scientific activities, financial and human resources management, and quality assurance. The commitment of the Faculty Management is also reflected in the establishment of the Working Group for Digitalization and Digital Transformation (February 2023), which operates in accordance with the work of the Commission for Digitalization and Digital Transformation of the University of Zagreb, whose member is Dean of the

Veterinary faculty. Special emphasis is placed on teaching activities, with the aim of encouraging the introduction of digital teaching content and tools and strengthening teachers' digital competences for teaching in a digital environment.

2 Methods

This extended abstract presents a descriptive case study of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine's approach to digital transformation. The analysis is based on a review of institutional documents, strategic plans, and internal communications from the faculty administration. Informal consultations with academic and administrative staff provided additional insights into the implementation process.

Rather than following a chronological narrative, the structure of the analysis moves from the institutional level (e.g., governance, infrastructure, and policy), through the academic and pedagogical frameworks, and down to the level of teaching practices. To illustrate the process in practice, a specific subject was selected as an example of how broader digital strategies are being applied in course delivery.

3 Results

A significant milestone in the field of teaching activities was the establishment of the Office for e-learning (2022). This was followed by active participation in the e-Universities project (2023) through two Pilot Projects and one Action research (Bilić Meštrić et al, 2024). The Office houses an Integrated Recording Studio (Pilot I) where teachers and students can prepare and produce audio and video materials for teaching. On the recommendation of the Office for e-learning, the Faculty's teachers joined professional development programs as part of the Academy (2024), which was

organized in cooperation with the University Computing Centre (SRCE) and intensified with the transition from an outdated LMS to the modern e-learning system Merlin (2022). A special contribution to the quality of teaching is made by the digital schedule system. The Faculty has fully implemented the ISVU system which among other things allows students to get certificates signed with a digital electronic seal (2023). The system is available to students of all levels from graduate to specialist and doctoral studies.

Some courses, especially during and after the Covid-19 pandemic, have made significant steps forward. An example is the course Histology with General Embryology where histological slides were restored renewed and then digitized through three projects: HKO at Veterinary Faculty, DEVet (Ulchar et al, 2022) and E-Universities. Through the Pilot Project I of the e-Universities, the digitalized scans were finally stored on the Vrančić supercomputer within the SRCE Data Centre. Through open access (OER) the scans are available to students of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine University of Zagreb, as well as other students and veterinarians around the world (Kužir et al, 2025). They can be found at the link (<http://cytomine.vef.hr/>) and are protected by a CC license (2023). In just one year (2024), the scans were accessed over 2,550 times with over 10,000 views. Most connections are from Croatia, but there are also numerous connections from other countries, especially from France, from where the majority of students of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Zagreb come attending English studies. At the same time, the number of connections from Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany are also significant which gives added value to the created teaching content.

4 Conclusion

Considering everything achieved so far, the Faculty is now facing new challenges, especially in the context of the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) and large language models. This raises new questions: how to integrate AI tools into the teaching process without compromising academic integrity? How to ensure that the use of

these tools really improves students' experience and not just automates existing processes? At the same time, it will be crucial to provide continuous support to teachers through education and technical infrastructure so that the digital transformation remains sustainable and relevant.

5 References

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