



ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ ΚΡΗΤΗΣ
UNIVERSITY OF CRETE

PTDE NEWS:

EDUCATION, INNOVATION, FUTURE



Message from the Chair of the Department

Modern technological, social, and cultural transformations demand a dynamic, scientific, and multidimensional approach to education.

The Department of Primary Education at the University of Crete rises to these challenges by offering advanced study programs, delving into contemporary areas of Education, and fostering research and innovation.

Through close collaboration with the local community and the continuous dedication of its staff, the Department provides an ideal environment for both student and academic growth.

We warmly welcome you to the digital newsletter of the Department of Primary Education – University of Crete!

Dimitris Stavrou
Chair of the Department

**Committee for Digital Research Dissemination
and Societal Engagement “DIA.DI.K.T.Y.O.”**

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A glimpse into the department

- **Year of establishment: 1984**
 - **Integration into the School of Education Sciences: 1995**
 - **Location: Gallos Campus, Rethymno**
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- **Mission: To advance teaching, promote educational research, and ensure the scientific and professional preparation of each student — the teacher of tomorrow.**



Stay in touch:



Research News:

6–9/07: **28th Annual Meeting of the Association for the Scientific Study of Consciousness (ASSC)** — co-organized by the **University of Crete**, the **University of Cambridge**, and **Liège Université**.

Over 770 participants from Europe, America, and Australia gathered to discuss key issues surrounding consciousness through a rich interdisciplinary program.



10/07: Publication of the scientific article **“Embracing Complexity and Uncertainties to Deal with Climate Change Challenges: An Interdisciplinary Module for Preservice Teacher Education”** in the **Science and Education Journal**, featuring contributions from members of the Department. The study focuses on how future educators can be prepared to navigate uncertainty related to climate change.

10/07: Publication of the scientific article **“Integration of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) With Artificial Intelligence Tools Through an LMS in Primary Education”** in the edited volume **“AI in Learning, Educational Leadership, and Special Education: Innovations and Ethical Dilemmas”** (IGI Global), authored by PhD candidate Christina Smaropoulou and Assistant Professor Aikaterini Vasiou of our Department. The study presents an innovative pilot intervention in primary classrooms where **Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)** is integrated with **AI tools** through a **learning management system (LMS)**.

30/07: Publication of Issue 2 (2025) of the **Journal of Educational Sciences**, featuring 11 scientific articles offering original research contributions across the broad field of Education Sciences.

25-29/08: Participation of the **Science Teaching Lab (E.Δ.Θ.Ε.)** in the **16th Conference of the European Science Education Research Association (ESERA)**, held in Copenhagen, Denmark.

The Laboratory's contribution included **three poster presentations** and **six oral presentations**.



23-26/09: Participation of the **Laboratory for the Study of Language and Literature in Education (E.M.E.Γ.Λ.Ο.)** in the **17th International Conference on Greek Linguistics (ICGL17)**, held in Cambridge, UK.

The Laboratory contributed with **four oral presentations** and **co-organized a thematic session** as part of the conference program.



Collaborations:

Academic Visit of Associate Professor Paraskevi Thomou to the University of Iceland:



The Associate Professor of our Department, Paraskevi Thomou, visited the School of Education at the University of Iceland, where she taught in a postgraduate program on linguistic and cultural awareness in multilingual classrooms, delivered a lecture at the School's research center on awareness in language learning and teaching, and met with academics within the framework of the Global Teacher Education (Erasmus+) program.

She also participated in the mid-term evaluation of a doctoral dissertation. This academically and scientifically enriching visit further strengthened the Department's international collaborations and the exchange of good educational practices.

The Laboratory of Advanced Learning Technologies in Lifelong and Distance Education (E.Δ.I.B.E.A.), in collaboration with “The Smile of the Child”, organized the 2nd Children’s Festival in Rethymno:



The festival took place in Episkopi, Rethymno, on Sunday, September 14, and in the Municipal Garden of Rethymno from Friday, September 19, to Sunday, September 21.

It was a four-day celebration filled with activities for children, including games, creative and experiential workshops, as well as virtual and augmented reality presentations.

The Laboratory of Science Education (Ε.Δ.Θ.Ε.) and the Research and Study Center of the University of Crete (KEME-UoC) participated in the “Researchers’ Night” at IPPL – Hellenic Mediterranean University (ΕΛ.ΜΕ.ΠΑ.):



The Hellenic Mediterranean University (ΕΛ.ΜΕ.ΠΑ.) and the Institute of Plasma Physics and Lasers (IPPL) organized the “Researchers’ Night” on September 26 at Tria Monastiria, Rethymno.

The Department of Primary Education, through the Laboratory of Science Education (Ε.Δ.Θ.Ε.), participated in the event with activities, experiments, drawings, crafts, and presentations for children and adults, presented by the Science in the City team.

Upcoming Conferences:

The Child and the Book Conference 2026

The **Department of Primary Education of the University of Crete**, in collaboration with the **National and Kapodistrian University of Athens**, will host in Rethymno the international conference The Child and the Book 2026, taking over from Tilburg University in the Netherlands.

Conference theme: Diaspora(s), Exile, Nomads & Children's Literature

The conference is one of the most prominent international forums for the study of children's and young adult literature, highlighting new voices, research perspectives, and intercultural dialogues around literature and childhood.

GIREP-MPTL 2026

On **6-10 July 2026**, the **Laboratory of Science Education of the Department of Primary Education, University of Crete**, will host on the Gallos Campus the **GIREP-MPTL 2026 World Conference**, under the theme:

“Bridging Physics Education and Society in the Digital Era.”

Postgraduate Programs 2025–2026:

Interdepartmental Postgraduate Program “Special Education”:

The Interdepartmental Postgraduate Program in “Special Education” focuses on the research fields within the area of Special Education, as well as on the production and dissemination of knowledge concerning the education and development of individuals with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities.

The program's aim is to advance the field of Special Education through research in its specialized domains and to cultivate new researchers and professionals in disciplines related to its core areas.

Critical Pedagogy and Teacher Education:

The Postgraduate Program in Critical Pedagogy and Teacher Education focuses on the production and dissemination of scientific knowledge in the field of Education Sciences, with a particular emphasis on Critical Pedagogy and Teacher Education.

Distance Education with the Use of Advanced Learning Technologies (e-Learning):

The Postgraduate Program in Distance Education with the Use of Advanced Learning Technologies (e-Learning) focuses on the pedagogical use of ICT — including artificial intelligence applications, virtual and augmented reality, and 3D animation — in distance education.

The program emphasizes the promotion of creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking in digital learning environments.



30/07: Graduation ceremony for **132 graduates** of the June examination period.

The ceremony was addressed by **Professor Andreas Fountoulakis**, Dean of the School of Education Sciences, and **Professor Eleni Vasilaki**, Vice-Chair of the Department of Primary Education.

The event included the administration of the graduation oath and the presentation of the **“Karamintzou Award”** to the department’s top three graduates.

A Few Words from the Department’s Three Top Graduates:

“I would like to thank all the people who, in their own way, stood by me throughout this beautiful and creative journey that has now come to an end. I wish that our next steps be filled with opportunities, inspiration, and creativity!”

Anastasia Mountoufari
Final Degree Grade: 9.63



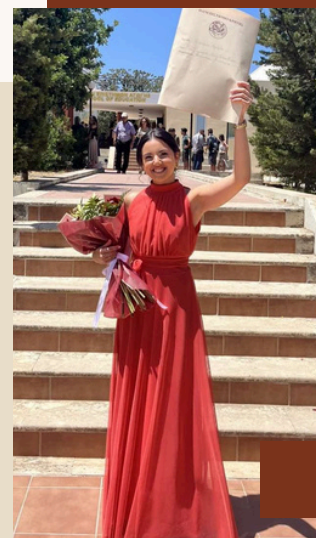
“I wholeheartedly thank all those who stood by me on this journey and inspired me to believe in a vision. This is not just the end of a path, but the beginning of a dream that once started and is now coming to life.”

Fay Smpokou
Final Degree Grade: 9.49



“My journey at the Department of Primary Education was one of the most beautiful and invaluable experiences of my life — a childhood dream “came” true. Along the way, I faced many challenges, but with persistence, patience, and effort, I managed to reach this point. After all, nothing worth having comes easy! I sincerely thank everyone who stood by me throughout this unique journey.”

Katerina Kokkinaki
Final Degree Grade: 9.46



A New Chapter Begins:

The three top-ranked first-year students of the 2025–2026 academic year share their thoughts and feelings about their upcoming journey in the Department...

Mariánthi Berkouti – 18,325 points

“I’m thrilled! After several years, I’ll once again find myself in the beloved environment of our university, studying a subject that I truly enjoy!

The Department of Primary Education offers an excellent curriculum that I believe will be both interesting and valuable — not only for me as an educator, but also as a mother. I deeply believe in the importance of lifelong learning. Every piece of knowledge is welcome, and I can only feel positive emotions about studying in this department.

I’d like to encourage all new students never to underestimate the value of knowledge, because ‘knowledge is power’ and ‘education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.’”

Kallia Gerasimaki – 18,300 points

“The emotions that overwhelmed me after this achievement were intense. At first, I felt pride and deep emotion, as I had reached one of my most important goals — my admission to the Department of Primary Education at the University of Crete.

When my studies began, I felt both satisfaction and excitement, since the courses offered were exactly what I had been looking forward to for so long.

My expectations during my time at the Department are, above all, to acquire knowledge about the proper education and upbringing of primary school children, and ultimately to become a teacher who genuinely cares for her students.”

Katerina Orfanaki – 17,415 points

“My joy is indescribable — I managed to fulfill my childhood dream and be admitted to my first choice with an excellent ranking. I also feel rewarded for all the effort and countless hours I devoted to studying.

My first impressions of studying in the Department are wonderful, as the courses are both interesting and valuable for my educational journey.

Through my studies at the Department of Primary Education, I hope to learn how to become a good teacher — one who nurtures creativity, imagination, values, and empathy in students, helping them thrive in a world of standardization, conformity, and monotony.

I look forward to participating in educational activities that will offer me new knowledge and experiences.

Never stop chasing your dreams, no matter how unattainable they may seem. With goodwill, patience, and the right people by your side, anything is possible!”

The Erasmus+ Experience Through the Words of Our Students...

Vicky, Emmanouela, Violeta, and Electra — four students from our Department — share their experiences of studying abroad through the Erasmus+ program:



Before departure:

Vicky: I've been waiting for this trip to Krakow for almost a year, since I made my statement. Just before I left, I felt excitement, anxiety, anguish, but mostly a huge impatience. But at the same time, I also felt a void, because I couldn't realize that I would finally live this experience.

Emmanuela: I was lucky and a vacancy opened just a few months before I was due to leave for the University of Bologna in Italy. Moving was something I had wanted to do for a long time, but I was both excited and nervous as it was a completely new place and experience for me.

Violeta: I was very excited because I knew I would have a unique experience in another country. I was looking forward to meeting new people, learning new things, new cultures and traveling as much as possible. But at the same time, I was also nervous because I would be far away from my family and loved ones.

Electra: My feelings were mixed. There was excitement for this new beginning, but at the same time there was a lot of anxiety, which of course soon goes away!



New house, new city:

Vicky: Life in Krakow was incredible. A large city, yet accessible, with excellent organization and infrastructure, which made a big impression on me compared to the Greek megacities. My accommodation was excellent but I found myself in the position of cohabiting for the first time, which was a challenge for me. Nevertheless, the overall experience surpassed any difficulty.

Emmanuela: The ultimate student life, a city full of international students and places. However, transportation and accommodation were very expensive, and you also need to be careful with scams when finding accommodation. Unfortunately, this happened to me from the first day, but I managed to cope with it and find accommodation thanks to the help of students! Life is quite affordable and students often go to student hangouts all over the city.



Violet: Life in Brno seemed very beautiful to me. It is a city with many students, easy transportation, nice cafes and several parks and places to walk. I was very impressed by the architecture, which is quite different from Greece. As for my accommodation, I lived in student dormitories with one of my best friends, Electra, which made my stay much easier and more enjoyable. The only thing that made it quite difficult for me at the beginning was the intense cold, which reached -10 degrees.

Electra: Brno is a student city with students from all over the world. Life there is generally calm, but there are plenty of options for entertainment. As for the accommodation experience, it was something different. It was my first time living in a dormitory, but I adapted to it quite quickly. Of course, the fact that I was living with one of my best friends, Violeta, also helped, and made the whole accommodation experience easier and more fun.

The New University:

Vicky: “The courses were easy to follow yet rich in quality and substance. We attended classes in person, and instead of final exams, we had final projects — something that worked out really well. The professors were flexible and always willing to help us.”

Emmanouela: “The courses were quite manageable, and the professors were cooperative, friendly, and had an excellent level of English. Oral examinations were very common. I do think, however, that a welcome day organized by the university would have been helpful — to get to know the city, the campus, and fellow students.”

Violeta: “Masaryk University was truly wonderful. It was very well organized, with professors eager to help and courses that genuinely interested me. The facilities were modern and clean, and overall, I felt respected and well-treated as an Erasmus student.”

Electra: “Masaryk University made a very positive impression on me in every respect. The courses I attended were interesting, practical, and well-structured. Moreover, the academic staff were exceptionally friendly and supportive, creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere for Erasmus students. I even had the opportunity, as part of one of my courses, to visit a Czech primary school together with my classmates — an unforgettable experience!”



The Return:

Vicky: “For me, Erasmus was a collection of unforgettable experiences. I chose to travel quite a lot around Europe, which gave me incredible images and memories. Those five months were full of new acquaintances, new rhythms, and the feeling that you’re living something truly unique — something you know won’t last forever.”

Emmanouela: “After this experience, I know I can rely on myself and handle any challenges that come with moving somewhere new. I feel more confident in my decisions and, more than ever, like a true citizen of the world.”

Violeta: “The most important thing I gained from this experience was stepping out of my comfort zone. I learned how to manage situations, communicate with people from different backgrounds, and depend more on myself.”

Electra: “The most valuable part of Erasmus, I believe, was the sense of independence. I stepped completely out of my comfort zone and learned to adapt to a new environment. I also learned to communicate and collaborate in an international context. Along the way, I traveled and discovered new countries and cultures — experiences that have changed me for the better. That’s why saying goodbye to everyone and returning home was truly hard for me!”

Friendships, Connections, and Bonds:

Vicky: “Interacting with people from different countries was one of the most fascinating parts of Erasmus. An unforgettable memory for me was an ESN event where we took a trip to a forest outside Krakow — we planted trees, had a barbeque, and painted in nature. It was truly magical.”

Emmanouela: “Meeting people from so many cultural backgrounds was definitely one of the highlights. I learned about other traditions, religions, and languages from a completely open and selfless perspective. I did make friends, though sometimes it was challenging to form deeper, more personal connections.”

Violeta: “My social experience was amazing. I met so many people who, despite coming from different countries and cultures, became true friends — and we shared this incredible adventure together.”

Electra: “I met so many people from all over the world and made friendships that will last a lifetime. People with different backgrounds, perspectives, experiences, and mindsets — yet we all happened to be in the same city at the same time. We shared one common goal: to make the most of it and enjoy every moment! These people made the experience even more meaningful and beautiful, and I’m deeply grateful to have met them.”

Life Before and After Graduation – Alumni Stories:

“Grigoris Swims Toward His Goals and Inspires”



Before Graduation

Why did you choose to study at the Department of Primary Education – University of Crete?

“Real change in society can only begin with children... If a child is nurtured with the right values, they can help shape a society that thrives for the good of all.”

How were your studies?

“The courses provided excellent guidance for anyone wishing to work as a teacher, and the collaboration with professors was truly rewarding. For example, together with one of my professors, we decided to take pedagogical action through experiential activities — as part of her course — to improve accessibility across university spaces!”

In general, there are professors here who have so much to offer, truly remarkable individuals. I believe the university opens doors and creates connections you wouldn’t easily find elsewhere.

And the School Practicum was an incredible experience... the smiles you receive from the children are the greatest reward. It’s the feeling that you’re contributing, even a little, to making society better for everyone — through games and activities on various social issues.”

Grigoris Kanetakis is 24 years old and studied at the Department of Primary Education, University of Crete, from 2020 to 2024.

He now lives in Athens, where he is actively involved in competitive para swimming.

After Graduation

Where are you today?

“A year after graduation, I’m living in Athens and competing professionally in para swimming. I’ve been swimming all my life for therapeutic reasons — ever since I was diagnosed with spinal muscular atrophy — to help me keep walking. During my teenage years, it became difficult, so I stopped for a while. When I moved to Rethymno, I started swimming again during public pool hours, where I was noticed by a man who collaborated with a team of athletes with disabilities in Athens. Three months later, we went to the national championship — and that’s how I got noticed in Athens. I met my coach, who convinced me to stay, and that’s how it all began — completely by chance.”

What are your goals?

“My greatest goal is to contribute, in my own way, to a society for everyone — mainly through children. The Department of Primary Education has definitely helped me move toward that goal. I’m seriously considering becoming a teacher as well.

When I decided to move to Athens last year, I found myself at a crossroads between two careers. In the end, I realized that I didn’t want to reach an age where I could no longer perform athletically and look back, seeing a version of myself that wasn’t proud. So I told myself, I’ll give it everything I’ve got and see where it takes me.

What I’m pursuing is very demanding — it requires discipline, and of course, personal life is greatly affected by sports life. But the truth is, I can also picture myself in a classroom. The fact that I haven’t done it yet doesn’t worry me. I definitely want to invest time in my professional growth in education too — it’s part of my future plans.”

To conclude, would you like to share a piece of advice?

“Reach where you cannot. It’s a quote by Kazantzakis that carries so much depth when you stop to think about it — what is it that you ‘cannot’ do? What does ‘I can’t’ really mean?

It means reaching the place you believe you can’t reach. What you ‘can’t’ do isn’t just a technical limit — it’s the point where a person begins to confront fear, insecurity, comfort, and the lies they tell themselves. Essentially, it’s the moment where denial ends and truth begins. That’s how I interpret it.”