

**Perspectives on Cooperation and Competition
in the United Nations Academic Impact**

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Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen,
Bonjour, messieurs dames,
is salām 'alaykum,

The United Nations Academic Impact (UNAI) initiative—mandated by the United Nations General Assembly—aligns institutions of higher learning with the Organization in supporting and contributing, through research and education, to the realization of United Nations goals. These goals include the promotion and protection of human rights, access to education, sustainability and conflict resolution, among others. What binds such institutions and the United Nations together in Academic Impact is dedication to a shared culture of intellectual social responsibility.

Academic Impact includes some 1200 member institutions in more than 120 countries. We are grateful that the Community of Mediterranean Universities (CMU) is one of our partners contributing

to the global diversity of regions and the thematic wealth of disciplines in the UNAI network. We thank the CMU and the Réseau Méditerranéen des Ecoles d'Ingénieurs along with our host Tanta University for the opportunity to be with you today. It is an honour to be able to speak with you in the land that gave birth to the Library of Alexandria not only once, but twice!

Institutions of higher learning are vital to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, adopted in 2015 by all United Nations Member States. Colleges, universities, think tanks and research bodies serve as incubators of ideas, inventions and solutions to the many global challenges that we face, and can also help ensure that the international community is harnessing the energy and innovation of young people in service to humanity.

Academic Impact is founded in the conviction that every subject and discipline can bear the imprint of the United Nations. Our aim is to foster the recognition of this link by relevant institutions and encourage and support, as possible, their undertaking activities that advance United Nations mandates and objectives.

UNAI assists its partners by disseminating information on United Nations activities and concerns that might be taken up at the local level on college and university campuses, in classrooms and in communities, and by providing a platform for academics to connect and share ideas

with each other as well as with the United Nations itself, where these ideas might find resonance in the policies and programmes determined by Member States—infusing, as it were, scholarship into the realization of our common social, economic and political objectives.

There is no cost or fee for joining Academic Impact. The sole responsibility is for each member institution to demonstrate support of at least one of the ten UNAI principles each year.

These ten principles include addressing poverty through education; building capacity in higher education systems; a commitment to educational opportunity for all people regardless of gender, race, religion or ethnicity; encouraging global citizenship through education; a commitment to the opportunity for every interested individual to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for pursuing higher education; a commitment to human rights, among them freedom of inquiry, opinion and speech; a commitment to promoting intercultural dialogue and understanding, and the “unlearning” of intolerance; a commitment to advancing peace and conflict resolution through education; a commitment to promoting sustainability; and, finally, a commitment to the principles inherent in the United Nations Charter.

Support for these principles in recent activities of UNAI member institutions informs the following perspectives on cooperation and

competition that I would like to share with you today in the hope that you might find them inspiring.

Cooperation

Let us look first at some forms of cooperation exemplified by UNAI member institutions, and of these at cooperation among academic communities across borders.

Al Farabi Kazakh National University

The Academic Impact Hub on Sustainability, Al Farabi Kazakh National University in Kazakhstan, helped organize this past July a workshop on collaboration among the Silk Road countries. The workshop was held in the context of a Model UN—New Silk Way programme for international and national students participating in the Silk Road Summer School in Almaty.

Students and faculty came from some ten universities from China, Kazakhstan, Italy and Turkey—all members of the Alliance of Universities of the Silk Road.

The Model UN—New Silk Way workshop focused on challenges faced by Kazakhstan, currently a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. For half a day, the students acted as diplomats, representatives of the United Nations Member States. They discussed three aspects relevant to cooperation in the Silk Road

Economic Belt. These were, first, the nexus of development and security, and how trade, transport, investment and regional infrastructure integrate countries; second, how development and security thus call for a regional rather than a country-specific approach, insofar as many problems lie outside of the framework of single-state solutions; finally, how international humanitarian assistance requires a coordinated regional strategy, including on the part of the agencies of the United Nations.

Gulf College

In Oman, Gulf College, through its Centre for Languages and Cultural Studies, celebrated the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development on 21 May. The theme “Exploring the World of Innovation and Entrepreneurship through Multiculturalism” focused on good practices that encourage cultural pluralism and discourage expressions of extremism and fanaticism, and highlighted the values and principles that bring people together.

Participants came from Egypt, India, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Oman, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sudan, Syria and Tunisia. The discussion underscored how diversification and inclusion—how recognizing the equal dignity of cultures through mutual understanding and respect—can foster more creative and innovative global citizens.

University Paris 1 Pantheon-Sorbonne

Within the realm of its own academic community, the University Paris 1 Pantheon-Sorbonne recently founded the first graduate school in France explicitly dedicated to addressing the challenges of sustainable development. The new graduate school will be involved in a range of collaboration among the dozens of masters programmes at the University by taking an interdisciplinary approach to topics relevant for sustainable development, such as mobility; democratic governance and collective action; social and environmental responsibility of organizations; and intergenerational choice, among others.

We can also look at examples of how institutions of higher learning are cooperating with their own communities for local impact that makes a positive difference in civic life.

CETYS

Following earthquake devastation in south and central Mexico, CETYS University not only raised some \$27,000 for rebuilding efforts, but collected around 90 tons of food that was sent to victims. Fundraising and donation efforts included student groups, staff and alumni, who worked with local community members who made available transportation to the affected areas and the Mexican army, who helped load the trucks with goods.

Drake University

In the United States, students, staff, faculty and alumni at Drake University joined hands recently with community members in building small-sized homes for homeless in its host city of Des Moines. The University also partnered in the undertaking with a non-governmental organization to study the potential use of such homes as a sustainable solution to the problem of homelessness.

In addition, I would like to mention two cases in which Academic Impact member institutions are cooperating with the United Nations itself in the area of translation.

Shanghai International Studies University

Two years ago, Shanghai International Studies University prepared the first Chinese translation in thirty years of the popular handbook *Basic Facts about the United Nations*. The University has now prepared the translation of the newest edition of *Basic Facts*, published in English earlier this year. It intends to publish the Chinese version through its own university press, thereby making the volume more immediately accessible, for example, to Chinese model United Nations participants.

Soochow University

For the past several years, Soochow University has prepared the Chinese translation of the *Yearbook Express*, an online publication featuring the chapter introductions to the authoritative reference

Yearbook of the United Nations in all six official languages. An innovative dimension to this collaboration is that the University has built a curriculum for its Master of Translation and Interpreting students in which this translation work for the United Nations prominently figures. Students get hands-on experience with real United Nations material and in working to meet actual United Nations editorial standards.

Competition

Let us turn now to a few forms of competition exemplified by some Academic Impact member institutions. In this regard, I am not speaking of the all-too-real struggle for resources, for students, for faculty, for public and private partners that colleges and universities face. Instead, I would like to highlight other constructive forms of academic competition that bear real fruit in different fashion.

MLOW

This past July, ELS Educational Services—a private sector organization in partnership with the United Nations Academic Impact—invited 60 student essay contest winners from around the world to attend the fourth Many Languages, One World Global Youth Forum in New York and Boston.

The Many Languages, One World essay contest that preceded the Forum challenged university students to write an essay in one of the six

official languages of the United Nations—Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish—examining global citizenship and intercultural understanding, and the role that multilingualism can have in fostering both. The only stipulation was that essays could not be written in the students’ first language, or primary language of instruction.

This year, out of a pool of more than 2,000 entries, 60 essays were selected as winners—representing 27 different countries and 57 universities worldwide. The 60 winners spent four days at Northeastern University working together creating action plans to address goals from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They then outlined these plans in speaking at the United Nations General Assembly on 21 July. As Secretary-General António Guterres remarked on the occasion, the students “demonstrated to us that at our best, we communicate for the sake of improving our world”, and that “multilingualism can ... contribute to a more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive and secure world”.

Solve

Earlier this year, the event “Solve at the United Nations” represented a collaboration between the Academic Impact and Solve, an initiative of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Some 42 selected innovators from around the world pitched their solutions to three challenges issued by Solve last November—on refugee education, chronic diseases and carbon impact—to a panel of expert judges and a

live audience of over 200 non-profit, academic, student and private-sector leaders. Successful participants were then invited to join workshops at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in May to work with the institution to establish partnerships with leaders from the public, private, non-profit and academic sectors in order to implement their innovative ideas.

Future collaboration

As mentioned at the outset, Academic Impact exists to provide an interface between scholarship and policy. At United Nations Headquarters in New York, Academic Impact is an active contributor to the recently formed 'Group of Friends on Education for Global Citizenship', made up of representatives of over thirty Member States. Our principal role thereby is to highlight the work being done in the UNAI network, some of which we have managed to showcase through relevant panel discussions including academics along with delegates and representatives of non-governmental organizations and the private sector. Noteworthy in this regard is the strong interest voiced by Member States in learning how global citizenship education can contribute to countering violent extremism; how global citizenship education relates to matters of national identity; and the kind of economic benefits that global citizenship education might bring.

In light of that experience, please allow me to say a few words of encouragement in conclusion.

Collective activity related to sustainable development

We would like to encourage the Community of Mediterranean Universities as well as the other organizations represented here to consider undertaking a collective activity related to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development or a particular Sustainable Development Goal. We would be most grateful to be able to highlight such a collective activity, whether cooperative or competitive in nature, on our website as well as in our reporting to Member States. As you are aware, progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is being measured with respect to specific indicators. Indeed, there are 230 such indicators: numbers, proportions, rates, extent, volume, shares, averages, totals and so forth. Member States are keenly interested in and attentive to research and case studies related to such metrics and indications of how progress is best achieved or what kind of programmes might successfully be scaled up.

UNAI activity reports and news articles

One requirement of UNAI member institutions is the submission of a yearly report of activities held in support of one or more of the Academic Impact principles. These reports are meant to be published on the Academic Impact website. We look forward to receiving all such reports of member institutions for 2017.

In a similar vein, we would like to encourage old and new member institutions to submit brief news articles (of some 500 to 700 words) on

their Academic Impact-related activities in any of the six United Nations official languages for publication on the UNAI website. My examples today have been drawn from such reports and articles.

UNAI member forum and webcasts

A novel feature of the new Academic Impact website is the member forum. Member institutions can now create discussion topics, issue direct calls for collaboration or solicit feedback from the Academic Impact network on any UNAI-related project. For example, the Ana G. Méndez University System recently called for contributors to assist in developing a survey study associated with global citizenship.

Academic Impact events that take place at United Nations Headquarters in New York are often webcast, and the webcasts themselves are archived for viewing on demand. This makes it possible for institutions around the world to follow such discussions, and we would like to encourage you to report on what then transpires on your campuses. For example, students and faculty from Lehigh University in the United States are preparing for publication a report from their viewing of the recent UNAI J. Michael Adams Lecture and Conversation entitled “Women Uniting Nations: A Conversation on Combating Sexual Violence around the World”.

New membership and ASPIRE chapters

Finally, we would be very grateful if all members of the Community of Mediterranean Universities would apply to become members of Academic Impact.

We would also like to harness your support to encourage your students to form local chapters of the student branch of United Nations Academic Impact that is known as ASPIRE: “Action by Students to Promote Innovation and Reform through Education”. ASPIRE chapters are student-driven in promoting and supporting the principles of Academic Impact and therewith serve to amplify the importance of unity and action in addressing global challenges.

Thank you very much for listening. I hope that the United Nations may continue to count on your support for unity and action in addressing global challenges, as you may count on that of Academic Impact in helping bring your work to the attention of the global public and United Nations Member States.