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**Project: IROconnect - Modernization and Digital Transformation for
IROs in Higher Education Institutions**

STRATEGY FOR INTERNATIONALIZATION

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Alecu Russo State University of Bălți (hereinafter USARB) traces its origins back to 1945, when the Teachers' Institute was established in Bălți (Decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the MSSR No. 532 of June 12, 1945). In 1953, by Decision of the Council of Ministers of the MSSR No. 846 of August 13, 1953, the Teachers' Institute was reorganized into the Bălți State Pedagogical Institute, and in 1959 the institution was granted the name "Alecu Russo." As the only higher education institution in the northern region of the country, the Institute adapted its educational offer to the needs of the labor market, expanding its professional training fields beyond the initial pedagogical scope. According to the Government Decision of the Republic of Moldova No. 330 of May 21, 1992, the "Alecu Russo" State Pedagogical Institute of Bălți was reorganized into the Alecu Russo State University of Bălți.

In 2011, by Decision of the National Council for Accreditation and Attestation No. 581 of June 3, 2011, the Alecu Russo State University of Bălți was accredited as an organization in the field of science and innovation, with all related rights to conduct research, innovation, and technology transfer activities in five research profiles. These rights were reconfirmed in 2016 by Decision No. AC-4/1 of June 28, 2016, for six research profiles.

The external evaluation for institutional accreditation was carried out by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), which, at its meeting on July 13, 2023, decided to accredit our University institutionally.

This achievement confirms our firm commitment to ensuring international quality standards in education and research, as well as our contribution to shaping generations of professionals.

To strengthen the University's position among higher education and research institutions in the Republic of Moldova and in the South-Eastern European region, to maintain passionate, creative, and valuable people within the Bălți academic community, to attract talented students—including from abroad—and to provide them with an innovative learning environment that ensures effective professional integration, we intend to implement the Strategy for the Internationalization of USARB, based on the Institutional Strategic Development Plan of Alecu Russo State University of Bălți for 2024–2029.

Institutional profile

- Name of the partner university: Alecu Russo Balti State University (USARB)
- Type of the university:
 - Public institution:
- Number and profile of faculties/ schools/ departments:

4 Faculties:

- Faculty of Letters
- Faculty of Exact, Economic and Environmental Sciences



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- Faculty of Education, Psychology and Arts
- Faculty of Law and Social Sciences

1 Doctoral School of Philology

1 Theoretical High School “Ion Creanga” (subdivision of USARB)

13 profile chairs/departments:

- 1) Faculty of Letters:
 - Department of Romanian language and Romance philology;
 - Department of English and German philology;
 - Department of Romanian and Universal Literature;
 - Department of Slavic Studies.
- 2) Faculty of Exact, Economic and Environmental Sciences:
 - Department of Mathematics and Computer Sciences;
 - Department of Physical and Engineering Sciences;
 - Department of Economics;
 - Department of Natural Sciences and Agroecology.
- 3) Faculty of Educational Sciences, Psychology and Arts:
 - Department of Education Sciences;
 - Department of Psychology;
 - Department of Arts and Art Education.
- 4) Faculty of Law and Social Sciences:
 - Department of Law;
 - Department of Socio-human sciences and Social work.

11 General Departments/Subdivisions

- Department of International Relations
- Quality Management Department
- Directorate of Information Technology
- Student Resource Center and Career Guidance
- Center for Didactic Activity
- Continuing Professional Training Center
- Center for Innovations and Technology Transfer NORTEK
- Science Department
- University publishing center
- USARB Student Self-Government
- University Library

11 Internationalization Centers:



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	USARB Internationalization Centers	International support institution
1.	United Nations Information and Documentation Center	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Moldova
2.	Information Center of the European Union	Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Moldova
3.	Romanian Information Center	Ministry for Romanians Abroad, Consulate General of Romania in Balti
4.	NATO Documentation and Information Point	NATO Information and Documentation Center in Moldova jointly with the Embassy of the Republic of Lithuania in Chisinau
5.	Francophone Employability Center	Agence universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF)
6.	American Center	Embassy of the United States of America
7.	British Cultural Center	British Embassy in Chisinau
8.	Center for Polish Language and Culture	Embassy of Poland in Chisinau
9.	The Russian Center	„Русский мир” Fund, Russian Federation
10.	Ukrainian Language and Culture Center	The Ukrainian community of Moldova „Заповіт -Моштеніре”
11.	Thomas Wilhelmi Conference Hall	Canton of Basel, Switzerland

- Number of students by level of study (for the last academic year):
 - Bachelor: 2907
 - Master: 650
 - Ph.D.: 27
- Number of staff members (for the last academic year):
 - Academic staff: 159
 - Administrative staff: 180



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II. CURRENT STATE OF INTERNATIONALIZATION

2.1. Vision and Mission for Internationalization. Values.

- What is the university's overall vision for internationalization?

USARB's **vision** is to be a national leader in higher education, recognized for academic excellence, advanced scientific research and innovation, and to become a catalyst for progress and prosperity in the northern region of our country. We aim to make significant changes not only for the University's students and staff, but for every institution, company and organisation in our society. We firmly believe that each generation of graduates will contribute to the development of the region and to the national project of European integration.

The Alecu Russo Balti State University **overall vision for internationalization** is to support the internationalization policy of the university at the national and international level, as an educational, scientific and cultural center by building inclusive, sustainable, and mutually beneficial partnerships, enhancing cross-cultural understanding, and promoting the mobility of people, knowledge, and ideas across borders.

- How does internationalization mission align with the university's broader mission and strategic goals?

Alecu Russo Balti State University assumes the general **mission** of providing advanced education and scientific research that responds to society's requirements. The main concern is the high-level didactic-scientific training of specialists capable of integrating quickly into the labour market, being competitive in a competitive environment through their capacity to adapt to change and innovation.

The internationalization mission of the Alecu Russo Balti State University its internationalization by placing the University in the unique European space of knowledge and research, promoting and facilitating cooperation activities and international mobility of the University's professors and students, distinct multilingual, marked by national and international openness plans and carries out activities in the common European spirit, to promote the fundamental values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Also University aims to stay globally connected and culturally competent organization that leads in innovation, collaboration, and impact through strategic international partnerships, facilitating the development of effective international cooperation programs, increasing the effectiveness of staff and student mobilities and ensuring visibility and dissemination of the University's internationalization processes.



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Alecu Russo Bălti State University commits to guide all its activities by the following fundamental values:

- **Responsibility**, reflected in ensuring academic and fiscal integrity, efficient management of financial resources and the state's patrimony. Every employee and student must adopt honest and integrous behaviour in all activities, taking responsibility for the quality of their decisions, actions and results.

- **Safety**, reflected in ensuring a safe working and study environment. Every employee, student or visitor must feel protected and safe. In this context, violence, abuse, harassment and discrimination are not tolerated, and the University continuously develops an inclusive academic community, respecting diversity, supporting and facilitating everyone's success.

- **Collaboration**, reflected in an interdisciplinary approach, focus on teamwork, achieving common objectives through the committed effort of all university subdivisions, supporting community projects, developing external partnerships, and involving the entire academic community in decision-making. Every employee and student must respect colleagues' work, the general rules of conduct at the University, and show solidarity and academic collegiality.

- **Freedom of thought and expression**, reflected in the possibility for every employee and student to express themselves freely and openly, to engage in reasoned debate. We are open to creative ideas, constructive and innovative proposals, constructive criticism, encourage diversity of thinking styles and research methods specific to each field, and show openness to everyone's freedom to establish research directions, methods and strategies, and participate in various structures and committees within and outside the University.

- **Innovation**, reflected in encouraging and supporting ingenious, creative and innovative ideas, developing an environment offering opportunities for growth and change. We are open to research-based solutions and providing consultancy and expertise to business and the community.

- **Excellence**, reflected in the commitment to serve our community by offering study and research programmes, complementary training and continuing education, by providing various services and organising dissemination events of academic and research results of the highest quality.

- **Transparency**, reflected in the effort to develop a culture of transparency to increase the quality of decision-making processes and access to information that concerns important university processes for all employees, students and partners.

- **Integrity**, reflected in honest, fair and ethical actions, building trust in the decision-making process across the University.

2.2.The university's current internationalization status and key achievements.

The Self-Evaluation Report on the dimension of internationalization and the results of the university for the last year, highlights the way in which the institution evolves on the dimension of internationalization.



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During the last academic year, Alecu Russo Balti State University (USARB) has further strengthened its internationalization agenda through activities and achievements across multiple dimensions: in-house internationalization, international mobility, international research collaboration, and global visibility.

In-house Internationalization. USARB maintains a diverse and dynamic international academic community. In the last academic year, 37 international students (30 at Bachelor level, 6 at Master level, and 1 at Ph.D. level) were enrolled in full degree programs. The international student body represented a variety of countries and regions, including Ukraine, Romania, Türkiye, the Russian Federation, and Cyprus.

In addition, USARB hosted 1 incoming exchange student and 17 incoming academic and administrative staff for teaching, training, and conferences. A total of 126 academic and administrative staff members were involved in international collaborations, workshops, and conferences, while 30 academic staff members delivered courses in foreign languages.

The University's study programs offered in foreign languages are oriented primarily toward the study of modern languages and literatures. Among these are English, French, German, and Spanish language programs, as well as specialized courses such as Didactics of the English Language and Modern Applied Languages (English). These programs reflect USARB's focus on linguistic and intercultural competence as key enablers of internationalization.

Internationalization Abroad. Mobility remains a central pillar of USARB's international strategy. During the previous academic year, 18 students and 17 staff members benefited from outgoing mobility opportunities through Erasmus+, bilateral agreements, and other international frameworks. The University maintained a robust network of partnerships, including 4 Erasmus+ agreements, 1 Memorandum of Understanding, and 2 other partnership agreements.

International collaboration is also supported through diverse funding sources such as the Erasmus+ Programme, DAAD, Catholic Academic Exchange Service (KAAD), Interreg Danube Region Programme (DRP), Helvetas, Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF), USAID, as well as Embassies of Sweden, the UK, the USA, Japan, Romania, Germany, Austria, and Lithuania.

USARB organized and hosted 35 international events, including conferences, workshops, cultural festivals, and public lectures. Notable examples include the EUROLAN-2023 International Autumn School on generative AI, the International Scientific Conference "Tradition and Innovation in Scientific Research", the European Film and Culture Festival, and the European Researchers' Night. Such initiatives have significantly contributed to the university's visibility and engagement with the international academic community.

Internationalization of Research. USARB's academic staff and young researchers actively participated in international projects and scientific networks. During the reporting period, USARB maintained 5 international research agreements with universities and institutions from Romania and the Republic of Moldova, focusing on cooperation in doctoral supervision, engineering research, and educational innovation. In the last academic year, researchers published 5 articles in Web of Science and SCOPUS-indexed journals, 37 in other foreign journals, and 21 in nationally recognized journals. Contributions to international and national conference proceedings totaled more than 150 publications, underscoring the university's active participation in the global research community.

International Visibility. USARB's increasing visibility and recognition are reflected in its performance in international rankings. According to the Webometrics Ranking (January 2023), the university ranked 4th nationally and 6783rd globally in the category of scientific publication citations. This outcome highlights the institution's growing academic impact and digital presence. Moreover,



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USARB is an active member of several international academic networks, including the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF), the Consortium of Universities of the Republic of Moldova–Romania–Ukraine.

In summary, USARB demonstrates a consistent commitment to internationalization through its diverse student body, global partnerships, research cooperation, and participation in international academic networks. These achievements have strengthened its institutional profile as an open, innovative, and globally connected university, contributing to regional and international academic development.

III. SWOT ANALYSIS

- **Strengths:**

Over 80 years of academic history and tradition, strategic location in the country's northern region. An excellent academic team: dedicated, qualified and high-performing students and staff. A varied educational offer covering diverse professional training fields. "Ion Creangă" Pedagogical College and Nortek Center for Innovation and Technology Transfer — excellent subdivisions within the University. Accredited study programmes and institutional international accreditation. Continuously modernising infrastructure. Valuable national and international partnerships and collaborations.

The strengths of internationalization within the university are international partnerships, improving the quality of research, increasing the competitiveness of students in the global labor market, organizing international events, fairs and dialogues that build intercultural understanding, encouraging the university to think globally but act locally and sustainably, building resilience and adaptability during pandemics, establishing international networks etc.

- **Weaknesses:**

Lack of programmes in English and limited access to information due to publishing content on the website exclusively in Romanian. Low number of students in some programmes and student dropouts. Distorted or incorrect perceptions in society about the institution, in the context of its location outside the capital.

- **Opportunities:**

Implementation of subprojects under the Higher Education in Moldova Project and international projects. Strengthening existing partnerships and initiating new partnerships. Developing micro-qualification programmes, dual education programmes, continuous professional training programmes within Nortek. A variety of funding sources in the context of the Republic of Moldova being granted candidate status for European Union accession. Opening a daycare center on campus for the children of staff and students. The opportunities of internationalization can be considered having joint degrees, dual programs, curriculums developed in English, developing strong alumni or diaspora networks abroad can support recruitment and partnerships.



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- **Threats:**

Low investments in the higher education system, well below the European average. Underfunding of research activities, which may lead to low correlation between teaching and research activities. The tendency of young people to choose forms of study with reduced attendance. Increasing competition among higher education institutions nationally and internationally. The threats of internationalization are political instability in key regions

IV. TRAINING OF THE STAFF RELATED TO INTERNATIONALIZATION

4.1. The current state of staff training

The training of academic staff at Alecu Russo Balti State University is an ongoing institutional priority aimed at strengthening internationalization capacities and improving the quality of international cooperation management.

The staff of the Office for International Relations (OIR), together with faculty coordinators for international projects and mobility, regularly participate in formal and informal training activities organized both internally and through international programmes such as Erasmus+, DAAD, AUF, as well as participation in International Staff Weeks and similar events.

For example, during the last two months, the administrative staff of the Office for International Relations took part in two training sessions conducted by international experts:

- Mobility and Internationalization in Higher Education: Advancing the Bologna Process
- Promoting Ethics and Academic Integrity: Developing University Codes of Ethics in Higher Education and Research Institutions

4.2. Needs Assessment for Training

Current training opportunities address key topics such as:

- management of international partnerships and mobility projects;
- intercultural communication and multilingual competences;
- digital tools for international project administration (e.g. Mobility Tool+, Beneficiary Module, EU Survey);
- quality assurance in international activities;



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4.3.Actions regarding Training Programmes and Initiatives

Specific Training Modules	Delivery Methods	Target Audience	Timeline for Implementation	Responsible	Estimated Resources Required	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for Training Effectiveness
International Project Management and Mobility Tools (Erasmus+, AUF, DAAD)	Workshops, online training, peer-to-peer learning	Office for International Relations staff, faculty mobility coordinators	Short-term (next 6 months)	Office for International Relations (OIR), Erasmus+ Institutional Coordinator	Budget for training materials and invited experts	Number of staff trained; improved accuracy in project reporting; feedback from trainers
Intercultural Communication and Global Competences	Blended learning, staff exchange programmes, mentorship	Academic and administrative staff involved in mobility and partnership projects	Medium-term (within 1 year)	OIR and Language Centre	External trainers, translation materials	Participant satisfaction ($\geq 85\%$), positive partner feedback, application in daily work
Digitalization of International Cooperation Processes	Online modules, internal workshops	OIR staff, IT department, faculty secretaries	Short-term	IT Department & OIR	Internal trainer time, digital tools (licenses)	Increased efficiency in online mobility management, reduced processing time
Ethics, Academic Integrity, and International Collaboration	Seminars with international experts, webinars	Academic staff, research coordinators	Medium-term	Research Department & Ethics Committee	Honoraria for guest speakers, printed materials	Adoption of updated institutional code of ethics; staff feedback on awareness level

4.4.Monitoring, Evaluation, and Review

Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism:

The progress of the staff training programmes and internationalization initiatives will be monitored through regular review meetings coordinated by the Office for International Relations (OIR) in collaboration with the Vice-Rector for International Relations. Each training activity will have



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designated coordinators responsible for collecting feedback, documenting participation, and reporting outcomes.

- **Monitoring will include:**

- Quarterly review meetings to assess progress, identify gaps, and adjust activities as needed;
- Annual evaluation reports summarizing achievements, challenges, and recommendations;
- Ongoing feedback collection from participants, trainers, and partner institutions.

- **The data collected will include:**

- Number of participants trained and their profiles (academic, administrative);
- Attendance records and participation certificates;
- Pre- and post-training evaluation surveys measuring skill improvement and satisfaction;
- Feedback from international partners and students on institutional support quality;
- Documentation of newly established partnerships, procedures, or tools resulting from the training.

Review and Adaptation:

The Training Programmes and Internationalization Initiatives will be formally reviewed every two years to assess their relevance, effectiveness, and alignment with institutional priorities and international trends. The review will be coordinated by the Office for International Relations (OIR) together with the Vice-Rector for International Relations, the Human Resources Department and the Continuing Education Department.

Based on feedback from participants, external partners, and monitoring data, the programmes will be adapted as needed to address emerging skills, digital transformation needs, and new opportunities for collaboration. Minor adjustments may also be made annually following internal evaluations or recommendations from project coordinators.

V. DIGITALIZATION FOR INTERNATIONALIZATION

5.1. The current state of digitalization supporting the university's internationalization

The digitalization of processes at Alecu Russo Balti State University (USARB) has advanced significantly in recent years. The University efficiently utilizes its internal electronic network, which plays a crucial role in ensuring the efficiency and transparency of institutional operations.

In addition, the University has participated in an Erasmus+ project dedicated to cybersecurity, thereby strengthening its expertise and capacity in this strategically important area. Digitalization remains one of the key priorities of the University administration, reflecting its commitment to innovation, modernization, and sustainable development.

Beyond ongoing digitalization initiatives, the University continuously enhances its electronic infrastructure to improve both academic and administrative efficiency. Modern digital tools and platforms are actively integrated into teaching and learning processes, facilitating blended and online education, as well as innovative approaches to research and collaboration.



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The University has developed and maintains a secure internal digital environment that supports electronic communication, document management, and data protection across all academic and administrative units. By implementing modern IT solutions, the University ensures transparent, efficient, and environmentally sustainable management practices.

Regular training sessions and workshops are organized to strengthen digital literacy, promote the use of new technologies in education, and support the overall digital transformation process.

However, there are gaps in supporting internationalization activities, as these are not yet fully supported by specialized software or programs for creating and managing internationalization databases.

5.2.Challenges, opportunities and benefits of digitalization in IROs

The digitalization of the International Relations Office (IRO) at USARB presents both opportunities and challenges.

Challenges include the partial integration of digital tools across administrative units, limited availability of specialized software for managing internationalization activities, and the need for ongoing staff training in digital systems. Additionally, the lack of dedicated platforms for international partnership databases and mobility tracking creates gaps in operational efficiency.

Opportunities offered by digitalization are significant. Digital tools can streamline student and staff mobility management, enhance communication with international partners, facilitate data collection and reporting, and provide real-time access to mobility and partnership information.

Benefits already observed or expected include:

- Increased efficiency in administrative processes;
- Improved transparency and traceability of international activities;
- Enhanced experience for incoming and outgoing students;
- Easier monitoring of international agreements and reporting to funding agencies;
- Support for blended and online education initiatives.

5.3.Actions regarding the future digitalization for internationalization

Specific Digital Projects	Technologies to be adopted	Target Audience	Timeline for Implementation	Responsible	Estimated Resources Required	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
1. Implementation of Erasmus Without Paper (EWP)	Erasmus Dashboard, OLA, EWP APIs	Erasmus+ staff, mobility students, faculty coordinators	Short-term (Year 1)	IRO + IT Dept.	Training for staff; technical integration support	-100% Erasmus+ processes handled digitally - Reduction in processing time by 30%
2. Adoption of a	DreamApply,	IRO staff,	Medium-term	licensing	Licensing	- All mobility



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Mobility CRM/Management System	Mobility Online, MoveOn (or custom module)	faculty mobility officers	(Years 1–2) IRO + ITD. + Mobility Coordinator	fees; initial setup; digital workflows training	fees; initial setup; digital workflows training	data centralized - Improved tracking & reporting accuracy by 50%
3. Digital Partnership & Agreement Tracking Database	Partnership CRM (Airtable, Notion, SharePoint database)	IRO & partner institutions	Short-term (Year 1)	IRO + ITD	Minimal software cost or integration	- 100% agreements archived digitally - Improved recall & monitoring
4. Digital Training Hub for IRO Staff	LMS-based micromodules, webinars (EWP training, GDPR, digital tools)	IRO staff, faculty coordinators, admin staff	Short-term and ongoing	IRO + HRD	Training content, subscriptions	- 100% staff trained - Annual digital competencies assessment

5.4. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Review

Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism:

The progress of digitalization initiatives will be monitored quarterly through review meetings led by the Office for International Relations in cooperation with the IT Department and the Vice-Rector for International Relations. Data will be collected on system usage rates, user satisfaction, and technical performance.

Key monitoring data will include:

- Number of digitalized processes implemented;
 - - System access logs and response times;
 - Feedback from users (staff, students, partners);
 - Reports on technical issues and improvements implemented.
- Evaluations will be conducted annually through internal reports and external audits within Erasmus+ or national digital transformation projects.

Review and Adaptation:



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The digitalization strategy supporting internationalization will be formally reviewed every two years, with annual updates if needed. Adjustments will be made based on user feedback, new technological opportunities, and evolving institutional priorities.



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VI. RELATIONSHIP WITH ESN (ERASMUS STUDENT NETWORK)

Objective: To strengthen collaboration with local ESN to improve student mobility experiences and support services

6.1.The current state of the collaboration with local / international ESN organization

Currently, USARB has an established collaboration with the ESN organization located in Chisinau. An official agreement has been signed with representatives from Chisinau to formalize the partnership. This collaboration enables the sharing of information, joint activities.

6.2.Actions regarding the future collaboration with local / international ESN organization

Specific Projects	Target groups	Timeline for Implementation	Responsible	Estimated Resources Required	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
Joint Welcome and Orientation Programmes for incoming Erasmus+ students	Incoming international students	Short-term (each semester)	OIR, ESN Chisinau	Budget for event materials, staff and volunteer time	Number of students attending; feedback surveys on orientation effectiveness
Social and Cultural Activities (city tours, workshops, cultural nights)	All Erasmus+ students and local volunteers	Medium-term (annual calendar)	OIR, ESN Chisinau	Event organization budget, logistics support	Participation rates; student satisfaction and engagement surveys
Peer Mentoring Programme	Incoming Erasmus+ students paired with local students	Long-term (continuous)	OIR, ESN Chisinau	Training for mentors, coordination time	Number of mentor-mentee pairs; feedback from participants
Joint Information Sessions on Mobility and Academic Support	Incoming and outgoing Erasmus+ students	Short-term (semester-based)	OIR, ESN Chisinau	Venue, presentation materials, staff time	Attendance numbers; quality of information delivered (survey results)

6.3.Monitoring, Evaluation, and Review

Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism:



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The progress of the collaboration with ESN will be monitored quarterly through review meetings coordinated by the Office for International Relations (OIR) together with ESN representatives. Key data to be collected includes:

- Number of collaborative activities organized;
- Participation statistics of students and volunteers;
- Student satisfaction surveys and feedback;
- Reports from staff and ESN volunteers on the effectiveness of the collaboration.

Review and Adaptation:

The collaboration strategy with ESN will be formally reviewed every two years, with minor adjustments made annually based on feedback from participants, new opportunities for partnership, and evolving needs of incoming and outgoing students.