arQus

European University Alliance

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UNDERSTANDING THE ARQUS CHANGE MAKERS' SPACE (ACMS)

The Arqus Alliance is a strategic partnership between nine European universities aimed at enhancing academic excellence, mobility, and societal engagement. As part of its commitment to fostering lifelong learning and professional development, the Arqus Alliance is launching the Arqus Change Makers' Space.

The Arqus Change Makers' Space (ACMS) is an initiative of the Arqus Student Agora. The Agora aims to promote student participation and engagement at Alliance level, enhancing the Arqus experience through student-led creative projects, accelerating their personal and professional development, and improving Arqus student services.

Arqus Student Agora has a very unique feature. At each partner university, a group of "student contributors'' is set up to meet and work with the Arqus team with the purpose of designing student-centred initiatives. Student input is expected across all project stages: design, operationalisation, implementation, yearly monitoring and updating of deliverables.

The idea of students as change makers is not a new one. Higher education institutions across Europe have successfully implemented similar programmes based on the growing recognition that students have the capacity to be agents of change, and thus should be given the opportunity to make a meaningful impact on their own education and on the world around them. For example, institutions such as Exeter University and Birmingham City University have "Students as Partners" programmes, which enable students to play an active role in shaping their education and inducing a positive change within their communities. By adopting similar initiatives, the Arqus Alliance aims to create a platform for students to develop the leadership skills and knowledge needed to drive change and create a better future for all.

In 2023, the Agora Change Makers' Space is launching a call for students' co-designed projects through the Arqus Student Council as a sponsor. The aim is to encourage student participation in the decision-making process of the Alliance and in the Arqus Student Agora.

The call supports students from Arqus universities to connect and co-design projects that strengthen the Alliance. Students can submit short projects involving universities within the Arqus Alliance. Individual students or groups of students from a specific Arqus university can collaborate with students from other Arqus universities, as well as with local associations and civil society organisations, to develop joint initiatives.

Such projects can contribute to reshaping and connecting Arqus universities through transformational ideas linked to the mission of the Arqus Alliance.

By engaging in joint projects and activities, students can develop intercultural competences and build meaningful relationships with peers in a cross-European, multicultural and multilingual environment.

Proposals are reviewed and scored by a selection committee made up of members from all Arqus universities, based on the following criteria:

- **Relevance**. The proposed project addresses an issue related to the student experience within and across the Arqus Alliance.
- **Innovation**. The project demonstrates originality and creativity in its approach to enhancing the student experience.
- **Feasibility**. The project is realistically achievable within the given timeframe and budget.

- **Sustainability**. The project is sustainable and has the potential for long-term impact.
- **Collaboration**. The project involves collaboration between students at the local university and/or collaboration with other Arqus universities, local associations, and civil society organisations and initiatives. At least two member universities must benefit from the organised project.

VISION

The Arqus Change Makers' Space (ACMS) is a student-led transformative space where innovative ideas and practices can be discussed, launched, and tested, to shape the future and drive positive change in our university communities. Students are encouraged to take ownership of their projects and lead the change towards a more inclusive and student-friendly multicultural space, delivering effective and measurable outcomes. The ACMS is open to student-led initiatives that already exist on our campuses, such as student associations or clubs.

By developing their leadership and problem-solving skills, we empower students to become agents of change in their communities at a transnational and European level. This, in turn, supports the "third mission" undertaking of our universities and ultimately contributes to students' future careers as change makers.

DESIGN

In the ACMS, students are given *carte blanche* to submit proposals that are likely to have an impact on any aspects of their learning experience and personal journey within the university and in the broader social context. Proposals are expected to embed a challenge-based learning approach (for reference, see the MOOC that Arqus partners elaborated in 2022) and tackle societal problems affecting not only the student body but the society at large. Ideally, students' proposals should be integrated into existing didactics or stimulate innovation in the design of courses and other learning activities.

The ACMS as a whole is an opportunity to engage actors and stakeholders with whom our universities have not previously been involved, as well as a chance to strengthen the students' sense of participation and ownership in the academic mission of our institutions. Students involved in this space can fully express their scholarly potential in designing research, exploring forms of social engagement, creating cross-disciplinary connections, and developing transversal skills. Some initiatives developed in the framework of the ACMS may be rewarded with participation certificates, recommendation letters (upon request), or open badges certifying the acquisition of academic and transversal skills.

The ACMS is not conceived as a space for student representation, and is therefore not intended to duplicate existing bodies already operating at individual universities or within the Arqus Alliance. Rather, it is a space for creativity, innovation, out-of-the-box thinking and practice.

RESOURCES

A number of valuable resources are being developed to enrich the students' educational journey and enhance their experience as Arqus members; including the following:

The **Arqus Induction Pack** is a comprehensive guide designed for students joining the Arqus Alliance. Its purpose is to welcome students and familiarise them with the Alliance's mission and values. The pack aims to ensure and foster a sense of belonging within the Arqus community, and includes information on campus resources and support services, as well as a schedule of events.

The **Call for Co-designed Projects** aims to improve the inter-institutional student experience within Arqus. The goal of this call is to support innovative and collaborative initiatives that promote cultural exchange and the integration of international students across the Arqus member universities.

BENEFITS

Students can expect significant benefits from their active engagement in the ACMS:

- **Positive impact on their home institution and on the Alliance**: The Change Makers Space is designed to bring about effective and measurable change in the Alliance. Through project proposals, students can contribute to positive change and have an impact on their community in a way that is meaningful to the student community as a whole.
- **Ownership and leadership**: Proposing and carrying out a project encourages students to take ownership of their projects and lead change in the Alliance. This is an opportunity for students to develop their leadership skills and gain experience in taking initiative and being accountable for results.
- **Skill development**: Developing a project is an opportunity for students to acquire valuable personal and professional skills in communication, problem solving, project management, time management and teamwork. These skills are essential for success in any field and are highly valued by employers.
- **Community and network building**: Participating in the project provides an opportunity for students to connect with like-minded individuals, build relationships, and create a sense of community within the Arqus Alliance.
- **Learning and growth**: Through participation, students can learn from their experiences, receive feedback, and reflect on their performance. This creates opportunities for growth and development, both personally and academically.

RECOGNITION

Participation in the Change Makers Space is acknowledged in many ways.

Firstly, students receive an Arqus certificate of participation as evidence of their active involvement. Additionally, a recommendation letter can be provided upon request, highlighting their dedication and contributions. Participants may also earn an open badge on Arqus student engagement, showcasing their commitment to the programme.

Moreover, the programme focuses on fostering both academic and transversal skill acquisition, allowing participants to enhance their knowledge and capabilities.

To ensure that students have a clear understanding of the objectives and features of the ACMS, and how it aims to enhance student engagement in the Arqus Alliance, the following strategies are suggested to be developed in each partner university:

- **Orientation session**: An orientation session open to all students can be held at the beginning of the academic year as part of the induction to Arqus. This session can provide an overview of the ACMS, including its objectives and goals, and how it aims to enhance student engagement in the Alliance.

- **Promotional materials**: We suggest producing materials (such as brochures or videos) that provide an overview of the ACMS initiatives and projects, their goals, and expected outcomes. These materials can be shared with participating students and made available online for easy access.

- **Regular communication**: The Student Agora team will communicate regularly with students, providing updates on calls, highlighting successful projects, and sharing stories of impact. This can help students understand how their work contributes to the overall goals of the ACMS.

- **External consultation**: The Student Agora team can invite external speakers to share their experiences and insights on any aspects relevant to the project. These speakers can provide context and motivation for students, helping them to understand the potential impact of their work.

- **Collaborative activities**: All the students involved in the co-designed projects should meet at least once during the implementation period in order to discuss and share their progress and any difficulties they have encountered. The Student Agora team can design periodic collaborative activities with all the students, not just those involved in selected projects, to emphasise the importance of student involvement and how it can be enhanced.

OUTCOMES

The outcomes of ACMS are designed to be impactful and widely accessible, fostering a sense of community and long-term influence:

- **Dissemination**: The outcomes of ACMS projects will be published online, ensuring accessibility for all Alliance members. This transparency promotes knowledge sharing and facilitates the dissemination of innovative ideas and solutions.
- **Project promotion**: ACMS projects and their outcomes and impacts will be continuously promoted by the scholars, students, and mentors involved in these initiatives. This ongoing advocacy aims to create a lasting impact within the academic community.
- **Meet-ups for sharing**: Regular meet-ups will be organised to provide a platform for participants to share their experiences, insights, and collaborative contexts. These gatherings encourage ongoing dialogue, cross-pollination of ideas, and the exchange of best practices.
- **Community building**: ACMS serves as a catalyst for the creation of a vibrant community of practice. This community, composed of scholars, students, and mentors, will collaborate, learn

from one another, and collectively drive positive change within the Alliance. Through shared experiences and collective efforts, the community will strengthen over time, fostering a supportive and dynamic environment for future endeavours.

PLANNING AND EXECUTING AN ACMS PROJECT

Below are some broad guidelines to help project members move forward. Students will develop their projects autonomously while having the option to seek support from academic staff mentors. The following suggestions are particularly tailored to support those wishing to participate in the call for students' co-designed projects.

PLANNING AND EXECUTING

There are certain skills that undoubtedly contribute to the success of a project. Participating students will be offered guidance and support as they learn about the importance of project management, identifying goals, objectives and outcomes, developing a timeline, assigning tasks, and tracking progress.

To effectively plan and execute an ACMS project, students can take the following steps:

1. **Identify the problem or opportunity**: The first step is to identify a problem or opportunity within the Arqus Alliance that students want to address. This could be a challenge related to student engagement, diversity and inclusion, sustainability, or any other area of interest.
2. **Form a project team**: It is important to assemble a multi-institutional and multi-disciplinary team consisting of people with diverse skills and perspectives (academics, researchers, staff, community…). This team should have clear roles and responsibilities and be committed to the success of the project.
3. **Develop a project proposal**: Once the problem or opportunity has been identified, students should develop a project proposal that outlines the scope of the project, its goals, and expected outcomes. To achieve success in the ACMS, students must set clear objectives and goals. They must identify what they want to achieve, why it is important, and how they will measure success. This involves creating a clear vision for the project and breaking it down into achievable goals and objectives. The proposal should include a timeline, budget, and resources required to complete the project.
4. **Develop a collective vision and find external support**: After developing the project proposal, students should engage with relevant stakeholders, gathering their feedback and support. These include anyone who will be impacted by the project or can influence its success, such as faculty members, Arqus staff, and other students. Students should identify stakeholders' needs and expectations, and develop strategies for engaging and communicating. This can help to refine the project proposal and ensure that it aligns with the goals of the Alliance.
5. **Apply for funding**: Funding is primarily intended to reimburse students for minor project costs. Proposals should therefore structure their budget request based on the costs needed to complete a specific activity.
6. **Develop an action plan**: Creating a detailed action plan that outlines the steps required to complete the project is key to its success. An ideal action plan includes timelines, milestones, and deliverables, as well as strategies for addressing any challenges that may arise.

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7. **Implement the project**: With the action plan in place, the project team should begin implementing the project, ensuring that each step is completed on time and within budget. Communication among team members and with stakeholders is essential during this phase.

8. **Evaluate, disseminate and celebrate**: Once the project is completed, students should evaluate its effectiveness and document their findings, identifying successes, challenges, and areas for improvement.

By following these suggested steps, students will be able to plan and execute their Change Makers project effectively, ensuring that it aligns with the goals of the Arqus Alliance, contributes to positive change in the Alliance community and achieves the desired outcomes.

EVALUATING

Measuring the success of an ACMS project is crucial to assessing its impact and determining whether it has achieved its goals. To effectively measure the success of their project, students should define clear metrics in their project proposal and action plan. They should also establish a timeline for data collection and analysis, as well as for communicating their findings to project stakeholders on a regular basis. By using a combination of tools and techniques, students can gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of their Change Makers project and identify areas for improvement.

Here are some tools and techniques that students can use to measure the success of their project:

- **Surveys and questionnaires**: Surveys and questionnaires can be used to collect data on the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours of individuals before and after the project. This can help students assess whether their project has had a positive impact on the target audience.
- **Interviews and focus groups**: Interviews and focus groups can be used to collect in-depth qualitative data on the experiences and perspectives of project participants. This can provide valuable insights into the success of the project and areas for improvement.
- **Social media analytics**: Social media analytics can be used to track engagement with the project and the reach of project-related content. This can help students understand the level of interest in the project and whether it is achieving its intended impact.
- **Project metrics**: Project metrics such as the number of people reached, the number of hours worked, or the amount of money raised can provide quantitative data on the success of the project. These metrics should be chosen carefully to ensure that they align with the project's goals and intended outcomes.

PERSONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

The success of an ACMS project in the Arqus Alliance depends not only on the technical aspects of the project but also on the personal skills of the project team members. By attending training sessions, seeking feedback, and reflecting on personal performance, students can develop these skills and make their project successful. In addition, prioritising self-care and maintaining a healthy work-life balance is crucial to avoid burnout and ensure that students can make the best possible contribution to the project.

PERSONAL SKILLS

An ACMS project requires various personal skills such as leadership, teamwork, time management, and communication. Students must learn how to motivate their team members, set goals, and lead by example. Effective communication is also crucial to ensure that team members understand their roles, responsibilities, and deadlines.

STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING PERSONAL SKILLS

To develop personal skills, students can attend training sessions, workshops, and conferences that focus on leadership, teamwork, and communication. These opportunities will provide them with valuable insights, knowledge, and skills necessary for success in the project. Additionally, seeking feedback from peers and mentors can help students identify their strengths and weaknesses, enabling them to develop an action plan to improve their skills. Reflecting on personal performance can also help students identify areas for improvement and set goals to develop their personal skills further.

SELF-CARE AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

An ACMS project can be demanding, requiring students to prioritise self-care and maintain a healthy work-life balance. This can include taking breaks, exercising regularly, and seeking support from family and friends. Students must also be realistic about their workload and manage their time effectively to avoid burnout.

SHARING PRACTICE AND BUILDING COMMUNITY

Sharing practice and building community are essential components of a Community of Practice (CoP). A CoP can be defined as a group of individuals (e.g. students, teachers and staff) who come together to share knowledge, experiences, and best practices related to a specific area or topic, to develop a deeper understanding of their area of interest, and enhance their skills and knowledge.

Building community and sharing practice are essential for creating positive change in the Arqus Alliance. Arqus students have a chance to build a strong community of Change Makers, committed to enhancing student engagement. Sharing practices through blogs, articles, webinars, and collaborations can provide valuable opportunities to learn from others' experiences, collaborate on projects, and create a sense of shared purpose and identity.

BUILDING COMMUNITY

To foster a sense of community, students can attend events such as conferences, workshops, and seminars hosted by the Arqus Alliance or any of its partner universities. These events provide opportunities for students to meet and network with others. Participating in online forums and social media groups can also help build connections within the community.

To share their practices, students can do one or more of the following:

- Get engaged in the ACMS, and share their experiences and ideas.
- Participate in online forums, webinars, and podcasts, or post on online blogs to discuss their projects and learn from others.
- Plan and host an event (such as a conference or a workshop) where existing networks and CoPs can share their activities.
- Collaborate on projects with students from other universities.

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