

**Universum International College – UNI**

 **Research Strategy 2024-2034**

# Vision and Key Research Themes

UNI aspires to be recognized as a national leading institution, whose scholarship and research will contribute to the advancement of intellectual inquiry and discovery, and which will generate knowledge that enhances social and economic progress in the Balkans

In its nature, research at UNI should be interdisciplinary, collaborative and applied, linked to its academic strengths and relevant to the national context, where industry connections can be one of the major drivers.

## 1.1 Primary Areas of Interest

1.1.1 Staff Research Interests

Of course, one important area of promoting research in UNI is assisting individual staff members to continue with their independent research activities. This is essentially the cornerstone of any research policy, and measures must be taken to ensure that staff have sufficient time and resources to undertake scientific research. These efforts should also be incentivized, and some information regarding this will be covered later in the document (Section 4).

1.1.2 Sustainable Development Goals

Our research endeavours aim to contribute towards an improvement in the conditions of society. For this reason, we have found it useful to categorise institutional research according to the UN sustainable development goals. A list of the most pertinent goals within the institution’s plans is given in Box 1. This is not intended as an exhaustive or exclusive categorization of research activity, but is meant to orient efforts in initiatives which we feel are particularly conducive to impact for UNI.

Some of these goals include Health and Well-Being, Sustainability, and Strong Institutions.

Box 1. Sustainable Development Goals for UNI Research Profile

* 3. Good health and well-being
* 4. Quality education
* 5. Gender equality
* 7. Affordable and clean energy
* 8. Decent work and economic growth
* 9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure
* 11. Sustainable cities and communities
* 12. Responsible consumption and production
* 16. Peace, justice and strong institutions
* 17. Partnerships for the goals

1.1.3 Applied Research

The structure and resources of the institution necessitate a focus on applied research. This means that fundamental, basic scientific research is generally outside of the scope of research activities in the institution. For example, our institution includes several health related disciplines, such as Nursing, Dental Hygiene and Physiotherapy, with other courses, such as Laboratory Biomedicine, likely to be added in the near future. Research in these related areas, rather than examining the underlying biomedical mechanisms, will more likely focus instead on the experience and outcomes of patients, population health, and testing diagnostic methods in real healthcare settings. Analysis of policy and its impact is also key in all areas, as well as innovation and testing of new approaches.

1.1.4 International Cooperation

The quality of research outputs will be strengthened by international cooperation. One example of a programme already underway is the Cintana Research Call, which places researchers in teams with other researchers in the same area in other Universities in the Cintana network. We aim to strengthen this mode of collaboration, by potentially providing seed funding for particularly promising initiatives, and using the opportunities afforded by our wide international network for the formation of research teams and pooling of resources between international researchers.

1.1.5 Collaboration with Industry

We intend to orient research towards direct application in the public and private sectors. As such, we plan to work directly with industrial partners.

Over the coming years, we plan to sign agreements with companies both within Kosovo and outside. The idea behind this is to align our research output with the pressing needs of society. Some of the main areas where this would assist in research output are:

* Engaging stakeholders in industry in refining research ideas and designs
* Developing short-term research priorities
* Using industrial centres for data collection
* Collaborating in the application of research results
* Student and staff placements

Within the focus of our targeted SDGs, the following industries may be particularly pertinent:

* Institutions in the health sector
* Manufacturing
* Transport
* Energy generation
* Infrastructure
* Construction
* Information technology

Our additional focus on policy, and attention for important issues such as gender equality, extends across all industries and could incorporate a variety of stakeholders.

# Current Status

## 2.1 Publication Portfolio

* Independent Staff Research published in international scientific journals
* Qualified staff for each programme
* Record of scientific publications
* Funding for open access fees
* Sporadic student research participation
* 27 articles with affiliation (includes only SCOPUS indexed journals)
* 33 active researchers
* Mean impact factor per publication – 1.56

## 2.2 Collaborative Research Projects

UNI has worked extensively in low-value grants with organisations related to government or civil society. Some examples include a project based on minority education in the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, which was financed by UNICEF. These projects have been primarily oriented towards policy and its implementation. Below is a list of funded research projects undertaken by UNI, often in collaboration with a partner in civil society.

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| --- |
| **RESEARCH PROJECTS** |
| **Research Project** | **Research Partner** | **Research Scope** |
| Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) | SPARK | World’s foremost study entrepreneurship. UNI-Universum International College International College hosts the Kosovo National Team |
| Politics and Election | Friedrich- Ebert-Stifung and INDEP | Politics and Elections- A survey of voters’ opinionitics and Elections- A survey of voters’ opinion |
| Kosovo National Election 2014 | Friedrich- Ebert-Stifung and INDEP | Public Policy concerns during the election campaign  |
| Education Policy concerns during election campaign 2014 | INDEP and GIZ | Education Policy concerns during election campaign  |
| Internet Penetration in Kosovo | STIKK, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and British Council | A research study conducted to estimate the number of the internet users in Kosovo |
| Delivery of Education to Roma Ashkali and Egyptian Communities | European Center for Minority Issues (ECMI) Kosovo, financed by UNICEF | Baseline study Delivery of Education to Roma, Ashkali anf Egyptian Communities in Fushe Kosove Municipality |
| Research of Local Action Plan on Environment | Regional Environmental Center | Research on environment actions and activities and plans |
| Analytics of the Kosovar Commercial Real Estate Market | UNI-Universum International College | Research on real estate market prices, turnovers and investments in Kosovo |
| Business Outlook |  UNI-Universum International College | Research on Business profiles and their activities  |
| Employment Barometer |  UNI-Universum International College | Career Office at  UNI-Universum International College International College conducts annual research on the status of employment of students  |
| Business in Kosovo |  UNI-Universum International College | Research on Business profiles and their activities |
| Study of the Kosovo Labour market |  UNI-Universum International College | Research conducted to analyze the general trends of labor force of Kosovo, such as profiling, migration etc. |
| Analysis of Domestic Products | INDEP | Research conducted to analyze the use and popularity of domestic’s products. Exports and imports as well as preference of Kosovo buyer |
| Analysis of electric energy usage for household equipment  | INDEP | Consumption of energy from household appliances |
| Drug at Schools |  Uni-Universum International College | Research conducted at the High School “Shaban Hashani” Ferizaj |
| Abandoned children in the Municipality of Ferizaj |  Uni-Universum International College | Research for abandoned children in the Municipality of Ferizaj |
| The impact of Digitalization in Teaching |  Uni-Universum International College | Impact of digitalization on learning |
| Bulling |  Uni-Universum International College | Bulling |
| Success of career students |  Uni-Universum International College | Research on the success of college students at UNI-Universum International College International College |
| Job Vacancy Survey 2017 |  Uni-Universum International College | Research |
| Unemployment (employability) in the Kosovo |  Uni-Universum International College | Survey on unemployment(employability) in the Kosovo |
| National Youth Emigration in the Municipality of Gjakova |  Uni-Universum International College | National Youth Emigration in the Municipality of Gjakova |
| Business Forecast |  Uni-Universum International College | Business Forecast |
| Politics and Elections | INDEP | Politics and Elections |
| Public Policy Report | INDEP | Public Policy Report |

It is worth noting that UNI has a large network of international partners, and is engaged in 27 capacity-building international projects. As such, the networking possibilities entailed in these partnerships can be leveraged using international mobilities and by encouraging staff to build international teams for research projects. Similarly, UNI is active in securing grants for the development of its facilities, for example a project funded by the Kosovo Challenge Fund, which will allow the development of a Mechatronics training programme. Such initiatives will also provide resources that can be used for scientific research in the relevant departments.

One example of an international research programme currently underway is the 2nd Cintana research call. Seed funding is provided by universities within the network, and has put together researchers from various countries in the world based on their research interests. At present, 9 researchers from UNI have been placed in research teams.

# 10-year Aims

Our intended goals for the coming 10 years are shown in the diagram below, and fall into the categories of: publication goals, active researchers, ongoing studies, external funding, conferences and infrastructure. Note that all goals are cumulative, e.g. we are aiming for 300 publications in total over the next 10 years.



## Publication Goals

Over the next 10 years, we aim to have 300 publications in peer-reviewed journals. This is divided into 50 in the first 2 years, 150 within five years and 300 at the end of the 10 year period. This goal is focused exclusively on journals indexed on Scopus and Web of Science. This does not include other forms of publication, such as policy papers, book chapters etc.

Number of publications is an important metric for evaluation of research, and is a contractual requirement for all academic staff. However, while monitoring this metric we are also aware for a corresponding improvement in quality. Above, we noted the average impact factor of journals as 1.56. While we have not set a definitive quantitative goal, it is expected that this number will increase.

## Active Researchers

This denotes an academic staff member or student who is currently involved in research work, and/or has a recent record of publication. At present there are 33 such researchers, and we will focus, in the first 5 years, on raising this number to 70 and consolidating their efforts with training and other support. In the following 5 years this process of capacity-building will continue and, in addition to adding to this number. It is worth noting that the number of programmes offered by UNI will grow, leading to an increased number of academic staff.

## Ongoing Studies

This denotes small research projects that would result in one publication. The number of ongoing studies is lower than that of active researchers because many projects will be realized through the formation of research teams within the faculty.

## External funding

The ultimate goal is that the research activity at UNI will fund itself, with minimal requirement for institutional funding. As such, staff will be supported to apply for grants within their fields, and will be informed of these opportunities. As such, we aim to receive consist funding from external organisations for research carried out at UNI.

## Conferences

At present, UNI organises two conferences per year. Rather than increasing this number, we aim to maintain this number at two and to improve the profile, attendance and quality of the conferences.

Not included within this goal are smaller dissemination meetings related to specific projects, nor does it include staff participation in other international conferences, although both of these are encouraged and may be supported depending on the circumstances.

## Digitalisation

The scientific community is increasingly oriented towards open science. Training is needed to help UNI to adhere to this standard. Some relevant tools include OSF and other study registration platforms.

Digitalisation of research will also include use of project management software. This will streamline research efforts, improve planning and communication, and enable tracking of progress.

# Policies and Incentives

## 4.1 Academic Freedom Policy

UNI upholds the rights of its academic staff to freedom of speech. This includes published work such as books, peer-reviewed articles or other documents, as well as intramural and extramural speech. In this connection, our approach to academic freedom is informed by previous statements, such as the Rome Ministerial Communique of the European Higher Education Area and its annex about academic freedom (2020) and the Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research (2020).

This is essential to the institution not only because of the ethical obligation to safeguard academic freedom; it is also essential to efficient and transparent functioning of the institution’s ecosystem. All aspects of UNI’s work are aided by safeguarding freedom, including cooperation with educational and other stakeholders, rigorous and critical education and research.

The notion of academic freedom is supported by a mutual trust between the institution and its staff. In addition to protecting staff members and upholding their right to academic freedom, UNI also trusts and oversees adherence to ethical standards and high methodological standards in research. As such, bodies such as the ethics commission will ensure that academic freedom is practiced while respecting the rights of research participants in terms of anonymity and voluntary participation. Staff, for their part, must adhere to the highest possible standard in research, and in considering the responsibility inherent in their role as researchers and professors.

## 4.2 Research policies, regulations & functioning

4.2.1 Research incentives

* Internal calls & seed funds

While it is possible to perform research with minimal costs, for example using questionnaires, textual analysis or reviews of published material, providing funding opportunities for academic staff will widen the scope of research possibilities.

As such, there is a requirement, in the coming years, for funding opportunities which can cover research costs. This can be offered on an ad hoc basis resulting from a request from academic staff, or with regular calls. It is envisaged that these costs will cover only small amounts (up to 4000), and may also require efforts for additional funding from external donors.

* Publication financial support and incentives

There is a funding opportunity offered by UNI to cover the costs of Open Access publishing. This is in line with our aspiration to promote open science practices at the institution.

At present, funding is offered to authors for first publications by authors in Scopus or Web of Science indexed journals, in cases where the author is the first or corresponding author. This covers up to €500 per publication.

There is also financial assistance available from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, which is offered on a sliding scale based on journal quartile.

In future years, these opportunities may be extended to cover a larger share of costs.

* Faculty responsibilities and performance

Each academic staff member has a responsibility to carry out and publish scientific research. The KPIs for staff members include the publication of at least one peer-reviewed research article in a Scopus or Web of Science indexed journal per year. These are monitored on a quarterly basis, and support is given in performance of these duties.

* Recognition of Research activities

Staff are supported in their research work, and research activities have the natural incentive of career advancement. Professors who are particularly active in research will have alterations in their other workload to accommodate this, and further incentives such as bonuses for publications in high quartile journals may also be implemented.

4.2.2 Improving Research Capacity

* Faculty professional development & mobility

Some academic staff bear teaching responsibilities, but have not yet obtained a PhD qualification. UNI offers flexibility to academic staff in the performance of their duties in order to help them complete their studies.

UNI has a wide and accomplished list of international partners, and offers mobilities through ERASMUS and other programmes. This provides an opportunity for academic staff to connect with others in their field and build research partnerships and collaborations. We hope to supplement these opportunities with mobilities for the purpose of research.

* Ongoing staff research training

It is important that staff training is not a one-off process, but something that is constantly augmented. This is important in terms of filling gaps in training, fulfilling unmet needs in terms of skills lacking at the institution, and developing familiarity with new technologies such as AI research tools.

Training will cover several areas, particularly in terms of the process of determining topics. These will be:

* + New techniques or software platforms
	+ Essential research skills identified by research team
	+ Essential research skills identified by surveys of academic staff

We plan to hold 2 trainings per year, but extra training can be arranged where needed, and external experts can be used to hold trainings when necessary.

* Standardisation of Software, e.g. analysis, data management

There are a variety of research related software platforms for tasks such as citation management, statistical analysis, data entry etc. We intend to identify suitable, low-cost or open-source software that can be used as a default programme. This will mean that students can be trained in these software platforms and can harmonise the work of the institution in research.

* Digitalisation of Research Processes
	+ Utilisation of data management platforms, digitalization of protocol process using tools such as OSF

Research workflow will benefit from systematization and use of digital platforms to manage the process. To this end, in the coming years we will identify suitable platforms for project management and data management. This will include training and promotion of the use of OSF, allowing pre-registration of studies, which contributes to transparency and improved planning.

## 4.3 Ethics

4.3.1 Comprehensive ethics policy and Ethical review board (IRB)

It is necessary to uphold a high standard of integrity in academic research. To better uphold such a standard, UNI will prepare, during the course of 2024, a full ethical policy based on the most relevant research guidelines, touching the areas of transparency, openness and beneficence.

Additionally, publication of research articles often requires ethical approval for the project. As such, in order to expedite this process while upholding a high ethical standard, we will put together an ethics board and an ethics application process for projects. In this way, researchers will be able to improve their proposals to align with ethical practice regulations.

## 4.4 International and Project Offices

4.4.1 Collaborative Research with International Colleagues

* Use of programmes such as Erasmus funded projects
* Partners from Cintana network

We will augment our capacity to gain research funding for local and international projects by collaborating with our network of international partners. An example of this is collaborating universities within the Cintana network, but UNI will also build consortia for other intiatives, including ERASMUS+ or Horizon projects.

4.4.2 Entrepreneurship

* IP
* Start-ups

These are not currently a priority in the strategy. However, the research staff will be alert should opportunities arise.

4.4.3 Industry connections

* Applied Research, industrial settings for data collection and research conceptualisation

This is elaborated above in section 1.1.5

## 4.5 Student Research

4.5.1 Student Research Projects

* Formation of teams
* Production of research projects
* Student research conferences

One aspect of our strategy is building capacity for scientific research in students. Students who have a desire to gain research experience can work in teams with a mentor who is an academic staff member, and complete a simple original research project. This will add to human resources for research, enable students to gain new skills, and give them the opportunity to publish academic research.

4.5.2 Thesis Approval & Support

For students who will complete theses, the process is monitored at the departmental level, and should include a review of the ethical implications of the work, particularly when human participants are involved.

4.5.3 Research Based Learning

In the course of regular course delivery, professors will be trained and encouraged to implement research based learning where appropriate. This entails assigning a particular problem relevant to the course and allowing students to explore and appraise literature on the topic.

# Measures to Strengthen Research

## Training and support efforts primarily focused on junior staff

As mentioned above, increased training for staff researchers will enable an increase in the quality of output, as staff are able to use new tools or apply new techniques in answering their research questions.

In order to action this, we will begin by distributing a staff research survey that assesses unmet needs and allows staff to request training topics.

This will be sent out in February 2024 and then from the beginning of each academic year for the remainder of the 10-year period.

In addition, research efforts will be supported by research staff. This includes assistance with study design and planning, formation of suitable teams, data collection and analysis, and writing. As a priority, support will be given to junior staff who need to supplement their publication record for qualification and accreditation of new study programmes. We will especially focus on building capacity in staff who have an interest in working intensively in research.

## 5.2 Assistance with research barriers, e.g. lack of training, funding

The previously mentioned staff research survey will help in identifying barriers. We will attempt to solve these issues as they arise, for example addressing a lack of support using the research commission and research support staff.

It is also important to ensure that resources do not prevent research work. There are several approaches to assist with this:

* Assisting with study designs that can give similar scientific value with less cost
* Resources such as software should be accessible to all researchers
* Research staff can assist with identifying opportunities to fund their research project, and assist with the application process

## 5.3 Dedicated time for research work

Staff who are active in research will also be supported by ensuring they have appropriate time within their working schedule to do so. It is not possible to plan for this, except on an ad hoc basis.

## 5.4 Incentives for publication

Aside from potential for career advancement and intrinsic motivation, publication incentives are not currently part of the budgetary framework.

Some future measures that may be applied are bonuses for winning funding from external research sponsors and for publication in high-quartile journals.

## 5.5 Hiring of staff who are already active (when there are openings)

This measure can only be applied reactively based on opportunities that arrive for new academic staff. Publication record and research skills should be taken into account when assessing potential candidates for open positions within the academic staff.

## 5.6 Formation of teams within departments (or multidisciplinary) to foster mutual support

Academic staff are pressed with numerous commitments. Most notable is their responsibility for carrying our their own classes including assessment, and many staff have other administrative responsibilities. To assist with management of these various responsibilities while also contributing to new research, a worthwhile approach is spreading research work among teams in each department.

These will not be a regular, formal group, but will be assembled based on the relevant skills and needs for each research project.

# Key Metrics and Outcomes

## 6.1 Individual Academic Staff:

6.1.1 Number of Articles Published

Staff are expected to publish at least 1 article per year. The methods identified above will aid in this goal.

6.1.2 Number of ongoing studies

In order to fulfil the publication goal identified above, we staff are expected to have at least 1 ongoing study at any given time. The research department will keep a database of ongoing research work and provide assistance where needed.

6.1.3 Citations per article

While there will not be a specific numerical target for this metric, we will follow the impact of individual research articles by measuring the number of citations on each article. It is hoped that work published towards the end of the 10 year period will tend to have a higher number of citations. Journal impact factor has been chosen as the main measure of article impact because of the timelag inherent in citations per article.

6.1.4 H-index

It is important that the profile of academic staff improves. This will occur in two ways: enabling existing academic staff to improve the quality and quantity of their research output, and prioritising a strong research output when hiring new staff.

## 6.2 UNI as a whole:

6.2.1 Number of Articles Published

As recognised in our institutional targets above, this is a key metric for the performance of UNI in the area of research. Again, we are including only peer-reviewed articles in journals indexed on Scopus of Web of Science.

6.2.2 Number of ongoing studies

This represents the overall number of ongoing research studies at any one time across the whole of the institution.

6.2.3 Citations per article

As mentioned above, citations per article is an important metric to measure in determining the impact of our research output.

6.2.4 Mean Impact factor of published articles

We currently have an average impact factor of 1.56 for the journals where research is published. Although this is not an indisputable measure of impact, this is one method to measure the scientific community’s perception of the importance and quality of research work. While it is not appropriate at this juncture to set a specific numerical target, we hope that the processes already identified will lead to an improvement.

6.2.5 Number of staff trainings held

We are aiming to hold 2 staff trainings per year. This is to maximise impact whle reducing fatigue with excessive training.

6.2.6 Number of Grant Applications

The research team will ensure that academic staff are briefed on opportunities to win funding within their field. We will also aim to build capacity in staff to write more compelling grant applications and to manage funds.

6.2.7 Number of Grants Won: Total Amount of Funding

We will, of course, keep track of successful applications, and provide support. An awareness of the amount of funding obtained through research grants is a way of measuring the progress in the department and the capacity for research work.

6.2.8 Number of International Research Collaborations

As mentioned above, international research collaboration is a key area of UNI’s research strategy. As such we will track year to year the number of collaborations that have been started, completed and are in progress.

6.2.9 Number of Students Engaged in Research

As mentioned above, there is sporadic student engagement with research, we hope to boost these numbers and systematise this process through the policies identified in Section 4.

6.2.10 Participation in conferences

Staff participation in external conferences will also be monitored. If this proves to be an unmet need, budgetary support may be added in future years.