



Global Challenges University Alliance (GCUA 2030)

Strategy 2025-2028

Document for General Assembly vote on adoption – 25 November 2024

1) Structure & operation of GCUA 2030

The Global Challenges University Alliance (GCUA 2030) operates on a membership basis in which all partner universities contribute an annual membership fee. General assembly meetings of all partners are held virtually twice a year. There is general support among GCUA partners for re-opening membership for new potential universities to join this next phase of the network – particularly from regions of the world that are not well represented currently.

As members of the network, the following roles and expectations are considered:

- The **Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU)** as secretariat provides general coordination for the network, as well as – dedicated in-kind time of staff for teaching and support activities.
- **All other GCUA partners** should – to the largest extent possible – take leadership roles in other operational areas and activities of the network (such as Working Groups, Courses, Mentorship programme), as well as seek to host or share various events of interest to GCUA partners.

2) Aims of GCUA

GCUA's objective over its previous four year STINT-funded phase has been to create and implement a global learning forum on sustainability geared towards PhD students – the next generation of academic leaders.

The next phase of GCUA (2024-2027) will maintain this focus on enhancing PhD student competence on sustainability, but furthermore seek to incorporate additional target groups. Explicitly, four target groups are considered in this phase:

- **PhD students** – to be engaged via several activities as previously (detailed below)
- **Staff and teachers** – using a 'train the trainers' approach based on GCUA course material

- **Institutions** – through support for actions and monitoring relevant to the *SDG Impact Rankings* assessed by THE. This support should be open and relevant to all GCUA partners regardless of whether they are formally assessed by THE
- **Wider society** – via engagement of societal and (inter-)governmental groups (e.g. municipalities, UNESCO Education for Sustainable Development, USAID) in GCUA activities such as courses and Working Groups, and for GCUA as a network to engage in these group’s work.

3) Focal activities

GCUA will prioritise the below listed focal activities in the 2024-2027 phase. Further elaboration of their aims and modes of operation are provided in the table.

- Mentorship programme
- GCUA Award
- Climate Action Challenge
- Course portfolio / Training of trainers
- Knowledge sharing
- Additional Working Groups (on topics different from the above activities)

Focal activity	Lead & support partners	Target group & aims	Operation (incl. Working Group roles)
Mentorship programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lincoln University • Penn State support • SLU support 	Aims to strengthen PhD students’ sustainable (self) leadership within academia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15-20 Mentor and Mentee pairs matched – annually or biannually TBD • Student ‘learning trio’ peer groups formed • Supplementary seminars on critical topics • Working Group to meet ad hoc and to examine evaluations annually
GCUA Award	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SLU • Other supporting partners incl. U. of Hong Kong, Penn State, Makerere, Beijing Forestry University, and others 	Aims to provide a platform for PhD students to communicate their research to a broad audience globally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working Group to serve as a judging panel to assess entries and decide on 1st, 2nd and 3rd place award winners • The winning prize and/or reward for entry will consist of the opportunity to present to the GCUA network (1st place), a diploma of achievement (1st, 2nd, 3rd places), and publication and archival of the submission video (all entrants)
Climate Action Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SLU • U. of Rwanda 	Aims to engage PhD students (as a credited course or a freestanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CAC begins with teaching on intercultural topics

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beijing Forestry University • Makerere • Other partners to support 	activity) to build a climate solution as part of an international and interdisciplinary team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentors from across GCUA partners are assigned to guide student teams • Panelists assess the final video entry submitted by teams • Working Group to consist of mentors and panellists, and to include examination of evaluations
Education for Sustainable Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SLU • Nelson Mandela University • Autonomous U. of Querétaro, Mexico (leveraging experience in adapting GCUA material for staff), University of Hargeisa 	<p>Aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • equip PhD students with skills and knowledge to tackle global sustainability challenges within context of the SDGs and intercultural collaboration • provide a ‘train the trainers’ facility for GCUA partner staff to enhance knowledge on theory and practical tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working group to include course teachers and others from across GCUA partners – meeting ad hoc and annually to analyse evaluations and adapt syllabi and the course portfolio • Courses (six weeks, part-time, mainly self-study): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agenda 2030: Synergies, conflicts, and assessment tools 2. Working and communicating across cultures 3. Education for sustainable development: Teaching for sustainability 4. Designing research with impact using the Theory of Change approach • Other Courses – TBC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research Ethics and Artificial Intelligence
Institutional impact for sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Led by U. of Galway • Participating partners: University of Tennessee, Michigan State University, BOKU, U. of Rwanda, SLU, U. of Hargeisa, + potentially others 	Aims to enhance collective institutional sustainability across GCUA partners in context of (but not limited to) submission to the Times Higher Education (THE) SDG impact rankings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connecting together officers from across GCUA partners working on submissions to THE • More detailed operation and goals to be defined
Knowledge sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SLU • All partners to support 	Aims to facilitate regular communication and knowledge sharing between GCUA partners researchers, students, and potentially wider society groups on focal activities, workshops and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletter produced four times per year – modality will be to schedule contributions from specific GCUA partners in addition to more regular content • Workshops and webinars to be organised on an ad hoc basis as

		seminars, and other information	<p>opportunity arises – e.g. from Working Groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GCUA Facebook page targeting students continuously maintained • Contact list of GCUA focal points continuously maintained • Contact list of GCUA Student Ambassadors continuously maintained
	•		•
Additional Working Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All GCUA partners 	Aim to connect GCUA focal points, researchers, and potentially wider society groups on thematic areas identified as priority within the network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research collaboration – e.g. to explore funding opportunities for ‘in person’ events connecting researchers • Academic-humanitarian partnerships

4) Theory of Change and MEL

As previously, implementation of the 2025-2028 phase of GCUA will be underpinned by a Theory of Change (ToC) based on the above focal activities, target groups, and intended impacts, and a linked Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) framework of indicators to monitor these goals and intended impacts.