INTERNATIONAL DEANS' COURSE LATIN AMERICA 2023/24

SAP GUIDELINES

I.   IDC LA programme information

The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), Saarland University (Germany), and the University of Alicante (Spain) jointly organise the International Deans' Course Latin America (IDC LA). This intensive training course is part of the DIES Programme (Dialogue on Innovative Higher Education Strategies), which has been coordinated by the DAAD and HRK and funded by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) since 2001 (www.daad.de/dies/en). Together, Saarland University (UdS) and the University of Alicante (UA) coordinate the DIES IDC LA. Both institutions have been cooperating for a long period of time in projects focused on the evaluation, development, and improvement of university management in Latin American higher education institutions.

Training in both hard and soft skills is a key part of this course, and issues such as Strategic Faculty Planning, Financial Management, Quality Management, Curricular Strategies, and Human Resources Management are covered. The methodology will be strictly practice-oriented and mainly based on case studies.

Participants, who are expected to have personal experience as a university manager, are required to develop a Strategic Action Plan (SAP) for their own faculty/school. The SAP will comprise the characteristics of the faculty/school and strategies to be followed, the role of the participant in the proposed plan, and the underlying administration and procedures in the thematic areas of the course. In this framework, participants will develop and work on concrete measures to implement the proposed strategy in their own faculty/school.
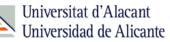
Background knowledge on the SAP will be introduced during the first part of the course (Module 0, Module I, and Module II). In the next part of the course (Module III), continued work on the SAP will be supported via online SAP Coaching Sessions and Webinars. The last part of the course (Module IV) will offer participants the opportunity to reflect on the implementation of their SAPs and other reform projects discussed during the training.

II.   Overview of the SAP: What we are looking for in a SAP

A good Strategic Action Plan is clear, detailed, and concise. It focuses on critically analysing the current state of the academic unit (e.g., the faculty/school today), foreseeing its ideal or target state (e.g., the faculty/school of the future), and strategically planning what needs to be done to achieve the said state. The SAP should be aligned with the institutional mission and expectations, as well as the reality and context of the academic unit and the larger organization (e.g., government regulations, finances, etc.). It should focus on objectives that are achievable, feasible, and within the scope of the author's role.

DAAD Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service

DAAD HRK DIES
Dialogue on Innovative
Higher Education Strategies

HRK German Rectors' Conference
The Voice of the Universities

III. Sections of the SAP

1. Abstract (200 words)

This section should include a 1-2 sentence description of the topic and a 2-3 sentence description of the main problems in the faculty/school as well as statements of the main goals and actions for the SAP. Please note this section usually does not require extensive review as it is the last section written by the author and should, theoretically, be aligned with everything else that is written in the SAP.

2. Introduction (800-1.000 words)

2.1. General description of your university:

This section should include a brief description of the institution's Mission, Structure, and Governance, as well as any other information the author thinks is relevant to have a full understanding of the institution's reality.

2.2. The Faculty/School

2.2.1. Historical context

This section should provide a summary of the historic development of the academic unit including any relevant information regarding changes in structure and/or governance, curricular changes, changes in government regulation, etc. After reading this section, you should have a clear grasp of the historical context that gave rise to the academic unit as it stands today.

2.2.2. Situation today: Characteristics of the faculty/school

This section should provide a summary of the current characteristics of the academic unit, including information such as the number and types of programmes in the academic unit, the number of students, faculties/schools, staff, etc.

2.2.3. Competitive position and SWOT analysis of your academic unit

This section should provide a situational analysis of the academic unit. It should identify and analyse the internal "Strengths" and "Weaknesses" and the external "Opportunities" and "Threats" of the academic unit. Although the SAP often needs to be shared with university authorities or, sometimes, governmental regulatory bodies, it should present an honest and critical inward look at the academic unit.

Guide questions:
- Has the author classified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats correctly? Be sure to notice if the author has, for example, mistakenly placed a strength in the "opportunities" section.
- Are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats coherent with the descriptions presented in previous sections such as "2.2.1 Historical Context" and "2.2.2 Situation today: Characteristics of the faculty/school"? Be sure to notice, for instance, if the author has indicated in a previous section that the academic unit is growing and that, due to its prestige, they have a constant and steady growth of enrollment, yet they indicate that one of its weaknesses is student enrollment.

2.2.4. Where to go: The faculty/school of the future

This section should focus on the author's reflection on the academic unit's ideal or target state, that is, where they see the academic unit going and what is the ideal future of the academic unit. It should be

Supported by the

Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
and Development

UNIVERSITÄT
DES
SAARLANDES

Universitat d'Alacant
Universidad de Alicante

Page 2

DAAD Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service

DAAD HRK DIES
Dialogue on Innovative
Higher Education Strategies

HRK German Rectors' Conference
The Voice of the Universities

centered around the "big issue" the author believes needs to be addressed and on an indication of what the author wants to achieve in the future.

Guide questions:
- Is the author's reflection on the big issue as well as their indication of what they want to achieve in the future aligned with the SWOT analysis presented in section "2.2.3 Competitive position and SWOT analysis of your academic unit"?
  - If this section is not aligned with the SWOT or the ideas that the author presents do not seem to be relevant in the context of the elements presented in the SWOT, consider recommending that the author looks at the SWOT again as a jumping-off point for what they want to achieve in the future.
  - You might also consider asking the author to perform a "gap analysis" as a thought exercise so that they might reflect on the current status of their academic unit and the ideal or target status for the academic unit.

3. How to get there: Strategic Action Plan (4.000 – 5.000 words)

3.1. Discussion of the "big issue"

This section should summarise the "big issue" that the author believes needs to be addressed in the academic unit. Oftentimes participants identify the "big issue" as the problems, difficulties, obstacles, or deficiencies that need to be solved in the academic unit. Other participants view the "big issue" as the vision they have as to the strategic achievement that the academic unit should seek to accomplish. No matter how the author focuses on the "big issue" the idea is for them to summarize where the faculty/school currently stands and where they want it to stand in the future.

3.2. Implementation of the action plan:

This section should (1) present the objectives (ideally, no more than three), (2) indicate the strategy/ies that will be used for each objective, (3) provide a precise description of the actions that will be executed and the corresponding time frame, (4) give milestones (i.e. specify the expected results of the actions and define success criteria), and (5) define possible branching points and the actions that could be implemented if the milestones are not reached.

The Strategic Action Plan Table should be used by the author in order for them to present a more organized, concise, clear, and coherent strategic plan. It will also help the author be sure they are presenting all the required information and better identify if the elements presented in different columns are correctly aligned with each other. If the author has not used the table, please remind them of the benefits (and needs) of doing so.

Guide questions:
- Does the author present three objectives?
  - If the author has fewer than three objectives, be sure to consider if the objectives they are stating are enough to solve the problem or reach their goal. If they are insufficient, you can recommend adding additional objectives.
  - If they have more than three objectives, you might want to ask them to reconsider if several objectives are, in fact, part of one, larger objective. You can also ask the author to reconsider their focus and remind them that they cannot change "everything" via this SAP.
- Are the objectives SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound)? If not, be sure to help the author understand how they might adjust their objectives to make them SMART. Please

Supported by the
Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
and Development

UNIVERSITÄT DES SAARLANDES

Universitat d'Alacant
Universidad de Alicante

Page 3

keep in mind things like the author's scope as a Dean/Director and the resources (e.g., financial, infrastructure, human, time) they might need to reach their objective.

- Does the author present strategic indicators for each objective? Strategic indicators should point to the future and the path that the academic unit is expected to follow. They will be reached in the long term (that is, in months or years rather than weeks or months).
  - o Here is an example of a non-strategic indicator and, consequently, likely needs to be changed: "Hire five new teachers within the next two months"
  - o In contrast, here is an example of a strategic indicator: "Launch one new master's program each year for the next 3 years"
- Does the author indicate strategies that will be used for each objective? Are the strategies correctly aligned with the objective?
  - o Example of strategies: "(1) To reconfigure organizational structure efficiently, (2) to define roles and responsibilities, (3) to revise financial structure for better analysis of performance indicators and management of resources and (4) to improve communications between campuses. Without this reorganization, other more advanced objectives such as improving curricular offerings, improving research quality and visibility, strengthening international cooperation and other academic landmarks will have little chance of being successful."
- Does the author give a precise description of actions within a time frame?
  - o If the description is too superficial and/or it does not include a time frame, consider asking the author to include these elements which are a key part of the planning and implementation.
  - o If the time frame seems unrealistic (e.g., too long or too short) consider recommending the author re-think their time frame. Some participants have found it useful to divide their SAP into "phases" where they might address their objectives in, for example, the short-, middle-, and long-term, or in phases 1, 2, and 3.
- Does the author specify the expected results of the actions and define success criteria? If not, you might want to consider recommending they include this information which is essential in the evaluation process of a strategic action plan.
- Does the author explore possible branching points and explain the actions that could be implemented if the milestones are not reached? If not, you might want to consider recommending they add this explanation which is key to remaining prepared under changing circumstances.

4. Strategic Action Plan summary (500-600 words)

This section should give a brief summary of your Strategic Action Plan. Please note this section usually does not require extensive review as it should, theoretically, summarize what has already been written. The author should consider the specific objectives that have been proposed. At least one sentence must be written in the summary related to each specific objective raised.

IV. Structure of the SAP Coaching Sessions (Module III)

The third module of the DIES IDC LA is divided into Webinars and SAP Coaching Sessions. The online SAP Coaching Sessions offer participants the opportunity to attend three follow-up sessions focused on their SAP development with their assigned regional expert. These sessions will be held between January and March, every two weeks.

The three SAP Coaching Sessions enable participants to receive more personalised advice from the regional experts, progressively improve their SAP, and review and learn from their peers' work. This will therefore help participants better determine the scope and structure of their project, considering all factors potentially affecting its implementation. Here, both Regional Experts and group members are expected to express their views to better support the drafting process in a collaborative manner.

Attendance and active participation in the three sessions are mandatory. Should the participant be unable to attend one of the sessions, they might be offered a Make-Up SAP Coaching Session. However, this SAP Coaching Session will only be offered upon the availability of the Coach and only to those who, with valid justification, were not able to attend one of the SAP Coaching Sessions. Failure to attend more than one session or present proper justification might lead to dismissal from the course.

For each working session, participants are expected to prepare a brief PowerPoint presentation (max. 6 slides) of the SAP developments in order to present it to their peers and their assigned regional expert.

In order to ensure the quality of these sessions, participants will be distributed in groups according to their topic preferences and the so-called "main" topic for their SAP (the one that better matches the participant's objectives). These groups will be determined by the DIES IDC LA Team and, if necessary and properly justified, the participant might be able to change their "main" topic after their first SAP Coaching Session at the latest.

The available topics to be distributed among SAP Coaches are: Human Resources Management, University-Industry Cooperation, Leadership, Internationalisation, Research Management, and Online & Curricular Strategies. Yet, one of the main pillars of this course is to understand higher education institutions from a holistic perspective, as all topics are intricately interrelated. Therefore, all (regional) experts in the course are given a "main" working topic based on their personal profile, yet all experts will be able to cover both the "main" topic of their group and the related topics that will arise during any SAP development process.

1. **Session No. 1**
   Objective: This first session will help participants define the "big issue" for their SAP in order to facilitate the further development of their project. The focus should be on summarising where the faculty/school currently stands and where they want it to stand in the future.
   Focus questions: Where do you stand today and where do you want to be in the future? Is your proposal feasible and sustainable? What is the alignment between your SAP and your institution's strategic plan? Do you have all the necessary support, resources, and time to take the project forward?

2. **Session No. 2**
   Objective: this second session will help participants define the viability of your project and the potential strategies at hand. There should be coherence between proposals and objectives.

Focus questions: What would be the timeline for your project? What actions should be taken to achieve the proposed objectives? Do you dispose of all the necessary resources?

3. **Session No. 3**

   Objective: this third session will help participants define indicators according to the established goals.

   Focus questions: How do I validate my project or how will I be able to prove whether my project is on the right track? How will I be able to measure the outcomes of my actions? What institutional areas would be involved? Who would be responsible for the different requirements of my project?

By the end of the Module III and prior to the beginning of Module IV, participants should submit a final SAP document in PDF format, a final PowerPoint presentation, and a poster covering the content of their SAP. The poster and the PowerPoint presentation will help participants present your SAP content to experts and peers during Module IV. Participants will be able to check the submission deadlines for each assignment in the Course Plan Overview.

- The timely submission of these three documents is mandatory for the successful completion of the course.
- The structure of the SAP should be as exposed above.
- The length of the SAP should not exceed 15 pages.
- The final SAP, the poster, and the PowerPoint should be written in English.
- The size of the poster should be A0.
- The SAP should meet the DIES IDC LA minimum quality standards.
- The SAP Coach will assist their assigned participants in the development of the poster and the final PowerPoint presentation.

For the final SAP review, participants will be given the opportunity to indicate their reviewer preferences. Please note that, in order to provide an independent assessment of the SAP, the assigned SAP coaches during the SAP Coaching Sessions cannot be selected by their group members as the final reviewers.