



Arctic Council Observer Report 2020: UArctic

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Cover sheet

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University of the Arctic (UARctic)

The University of the Arctic (UARctic) is a network of universities, colleges, research institutes, and other organizations concerned with education and research in and about the North. UArctic builds and strengthens collective resources and infrastructures that enable member institutions to better serve their constituents and their regions. Through cooperation in education, research and outreach we enhance human capacity in the North, promote viable communities and sustainable economies, and forge global partnerships.

Created through the Arctic Council, UArctic is committed to upholding its principles of sustainable development as well as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. UArctic is constituted as an International Association based in Finland.

Origins in the Arctic Council

UARctic was an initiative born out of the context of the Arctic Council who asked the Circumpolar Universities Association to conduct a feasibility study. That plan was then initially endorsed by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the eight Arctic countries through the Iqaluit declaration in 1998, declaring that they “welcome, and are pleased to announce, the establishment of a University of the Arctic, a university without walls...”. UArctic was launched as a network organization in 2001 with an International Secretariat in Finland.

In the joint [Ministerial statement](#) on the occasion of the Arctic Council's 20th anniversary, the ministers recognise the creation of UArctic as one of the achievements of the Arctic Council in the creation of institutions for regional cooperation and interaction in the Arctic.

UARctic signed a cooperation agreement with the Permanent Participants of the Arctic Council (2011) which is followed up by amongst other to have a permanent Vice President

Indigenous in UArctic. The VP Indigenous is held by Rebecca Mearns acting President of Nunavut Arctic College.

UArctic also has a rich and close cooperation with the Standing Committee of Arctic Parliamentarians. The parliamentarians' support for sustainable development, education and research in and for the Arctic is immensely important for the future development of the region. UArctic works closely with other regional bodies like the Northern Forum, the Barents cooperation, the Arctic Economic Council and the World Reindeer Herders Association to foster locally relevant training and capacity building and to strengthen the local academic institutions.

Contributions to the work of the Arctic Council's Working Groups, Task Forces and/or Expert Groups

Thematic Networks and Institutes (Select Highlights)

Examples of UArctic Thematic Networks involvement in projects of Arctic Council working groups, expert groups and task forces include:

- Thematic Network on Global Ecological and Economic Connections in Arctic and Sub-Arctic Crab Fisheries participated in the AMAP Socioeconomic Expert group on Arctic Ocean Acidification and its lead, Brooks Kaiser (University of Southern Denmark) is one of the authors on the AMAP AOA Assessment 2018.
- Thematic Network on Ocean Food Systems participates in SDWG and PAME processes including the *Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter*. The network is also contributing a chapter on Arctic Fisheries and Aquaculture to the SDWG commissioned publication on Arctic Renewable Economies.
- Thematic Network on Marine Plastics also work through SDWG and PAME, and is developing a field course related to the *Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter*.
- Thematic Network on Gender in the Arctic Knowledge Production engages with SDWG, with the lead of the network, Mervi Heikkinen (University of Oulu) is also acting as IASSA's head of the Finnish delegation.
- Thematic Network on Teacher Education for Social Justice and Diversity in Education was the main driver for the SDWG project Teacher Education for Diversity and Equality in the Arctic (2017-2019). The project enhanced understanding of the teaching profession in the Circumpolar North, and highlighted ways in which pre-service and in-service teacher education can help teachers contribute to a sustainable future in the Arctic. The lead of the Thematic Network, Tuija Turunen (University of Lapland) is expert in *Arctic Children: Preschool Education and Smooth Transition to School* project, led by Russia.
- Thematic Network on Human Adaptation in the Changing Arctic, has a UNESCO Chair, Anatoly Vasilyevich Zhozhikov, at Northeastern Federal University. The UNESCO Chair's project "Digitalization of the linguistic and cultural heritage of the indigenous peoples of the Arctic" is being presented to the SDWG for endorsement consideration.
- Thematic Network on Arctic Plastic Pollution has developed the publication "Global Linkages – A graphical look at the changing Arctic" as a contribution to the Finnish Chairmanship. It has also contributed to PAME's Desktop Study on Marine Litter and the Marine Litter Regional Action Plan. Also organized the Symposium on Plastics in the Arctic and Sub-Arctic Region hosted by the Government of Iceland in collaboration with the Nordic Council of Ministers as a part of the Icelandic Chairmanship. Also participates in AMAP meetings on behalf of UArctic.
- Thematic Network on Geopolitics and Security undertook a flagship research project *Arctic Policies & Strategies – Analysis, Synthesis and Trends*, a comparative, deep, systematic study and analysis of existing policies of the following categories of actors: Arctic States, Permanent Participants of the Arctic Council, Arctic Council Observer States, and AC Chairmanship programs and; Ministerial declarations, i.e. their priorities and how they are been implemented.
- Thematic Network Model Arctic Council organizes simulation events for students in conjunction with Arctic Council meetings. International Model Arctic Council events

took place during the Arctic Science Summit Week at the University of Alaska Fairbanks in March 2016 and at the University of Lapland in October 2018. As part of the Icelandic chairmanship, an online Model Arctic Council was organized as part of the Arctic Science Summit Week 2020. The next one will be organised during the Russian's Arctic Council chairmanship period in Russia in the time to be announced later.

- Thematic Network on Telecommunications and Networking was actively engaged in the of Task Force on Improved Connectivity in the Arctic (TFICA) 2018-2019. The network lead Harri Saarnisaari (University of Oulu) contributed to the final report as a member of the Task Force.
- Thematic Network on Health and Wellbeing is a key partner in the OneHealth initiative under the SDWG that began under the US Chairmanship of the Arctic Council and continued under the Finnish and now also Icelandic chairmanships. The network works regularly with AMAP and SDWG Arctic Human Health Expert Group, where its members authors of assessments and reports. The network also participates in a new Biosecurity project.
- Thematic Network on Northern Nursing Education has worked to develop the Northern and Indigenous Health and Health Care academic program and related curriculum, organizing its work during the Arctic Science Summit Week (ASSW) and International Congress of Arctic Social Sciences (ICASS).
- Thematic on Arctic Safety and Security works closely with EPPR and PAME to become a strong tool to ensure long-term collaborative research and education in the Arctic that can support the Arctic Search and Rescue Agreement.

UArctic Liaisons to the Arctic Council

UArctic has continued to strengthen its cooperation with the Arctic Council and its Working Groups, Task Forces, and Expert Groups through the naming of specific UArctic liaisons.

Chairmanship and SAOs:

- Gudfinna Adalgeirsdottir (University of Iceland)
- Gunnar Már Gunnarsson (University of Akureyri)
- Pia Elísabeth Hansson (University of Iceland)
- Dadi Mar Kristofersson (University of Iceland)
- Embla Eir Oddsdóttir (University of Akureyri)

Working Groups and Task Forces:

- **AMAP:** Katia Kontar (Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy - Tufts University)
- **AMAP:** Tina Schoolmeester (GRID-Arendal)
- **AMAP and SDWG AHEG:** Arja Rautio (University of Oulu)
- **CAFF:** Lauren Culler - (Dartmouth College)
- **CAFF:** Toke Thomas Høye (Aarhus University)
- **EPPR:** Natalia Andreassen (Nord University)
- **SDWG:** Eydis Sveinbjarnardóttir (University of Akureyri)
- **SDWG:** Joan Nymand Larsen (University of Akureyri)

Future Plans

UArctic Congress 2020/2021 Reykjavik, Iceland

The UArctic Congress 2021 brings together institutional leaders, indigenous representatives, academics, scientists and students from around the Circumpolar North and beyond. It is an excellent platform for all UArctic members to engage with each other and promote cooperation in circumpolar science and higher education. Together with partners, policy makers and other actors, the UArctic Congress strives to take the Arctic agenda forward by creating and strengthening collaborations that produce new findings and solutions for the future of the Arctic.

The first ever UArctic Congress was held in Saint Petersburg in September 2016, The Congress was the first time that all UArctic bodies – Rectors’ Forum, Board of Governors, Council and Thematic Networks – met together in the same location, and was well attended by leading scientists, and political decision-makers including the Finnish and Russian SAOs. The second UArctic Congress was held in Oulu/Helsinki, Finland as a major contribution of the Finnish Arctic Council chairmanship period, with UArctic named as a key partner in the education priority.

This strong linkage to the continues with the UArctic Congress 2021, originally planned to take place in October 2020, but now will be Organized jointly with the Arctic Council Ministerial meeting in Reykjavik, 15-18 May 2021

Relevant highlights of the UArctic Congress 2021 to our work with the Arctic Council include:

- Congress program keynotes and parallel sessions follow the themes of the Icelandic chairmanship program
 - *Arctic Marine Environment*
 - *Climate and Green Energy Solutions*
 - *People and Communities in the Arctic*
- Additionally, the program will include sessions on UArctic a platform of joint education and research, and also examine the new realities of circumpolar higher education and research in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Arctic Youth Panel
- Program for Rectors, hosted by Icelandic Arctic Council chairmanship, providing overview of accomplishments
- Joint celebrations of Arctic Council 25/UArctic 20 in 2021

Contributions to other aspects of the Arctic Council and its goals

UArctic has a concrete collaboration agreement with the Permanent Participants of the Arctic Council to ensure its work is responsive to the needs of northern Indigenous peoples. To further strengthen the indigenous perspective of all aspects of UArctic we have a designated Vice-President Indigenous who oversees indigenous interests and needs in all aspects of UArctic work. UArctic is open to membership from the Permanent Participants (waiving the membership fee). Currently the Aleut International Association, Arctic Athabaskan Council, Gwich'in Council International and RAIPON are members, and the others choose to participate through other relevant higher education institutions.

UArctic cooperates with other major Arctic conferences to help build the science and education agenda and promote the engagement of northern higher education institutions into

the programs organized in the form of formal partnership agreements with Arctic Circle, Arctic Frontiers, Arctic Science Summit Week, and Roscongress regarding Arctic Territory of Dialogue.

UArctic, IASC and IASSA, as the three science and education related observers to the Arctic Council have a collaboration agreement that has led to many joint initiatives and shared efforts to strengthen northern perspective on science and research in the Arctic. This cooperation also includes representatives in IASC working groups from relevant Thematic Networks, particularly in social and human sciences working group, and in the overall leadership of IASSA. A recent outcome is a joint article in the science journal Nature (December 2020) on how the pandemic should lead the world to a profound rethinking of how to conduct Arctic Science. The agreement also focuses on the joint ambition to strengthen and collaborate with APECS. Together with our partners IASC, IASSA and APECS we contribute to the knowledge-based decision making that is the basis of the Arctic Council's work.

UArctic actively took part as an observer in the development of the Agreement on Enhancing Arctic Scientific Cooperation, a major achievement of the Arctic Council member states that has the potential to simplify education and training as well as scientific collaboration in and for the North. UArctic conducted an online survey in 2019 on bottle necks in Arctic research cooperation which should be solved by the Agreement. The report on survey is openly available in UArctic, IASSA and IASC websites.

UArctic's Relationship to Arctic Council

Having been created through the initiative of the Arctic Council it is essential for UArctic to maintain and strengthen this close relationship. In addition to now three binding agreements on collaboration in the Arctic in specific areas, UArctic and the Arctic Economic Council are the only Observers that have been fully created through the Arctic Council, as expressed in the Iqaluit declarations 1998 and 2015. UArctic looks forward to strengthen its role as a child of the Arctic Council and help build agenda for a sustainable Arctic.

Non-Arctic Engagement

UArctic's engagement with non-Arctic countries (nearly all from Arctic Council observer countries) is demonstrated by the growth in UArctic membership from outside the Arctic countries, particularly from China, Korea, and non-Arctic countries in the EU. There are now a total of 34 non-Arctic member institutions.

Administrative Collaboration

- Communications collaboration between the UArctic International Secretariat and the Arctic Council Secretariat, focussing on information platforms and best internal communications practices.
- Joint Indigenous internships between the UArctic International Secretariat and the Arctic Council Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat.