

## Healthcare industry BW

# Eucor – bringing the European Campus to life

**Enrolling at one university and being able to use the services of a total of five universities is unique in the European Research Area. A model project called Eucor - The European Campus offers students and young scientists this opportunity at universities in the Germany-France-Switzerland border triangle, which simultaneously acts as a borderless academic area for the sciences.**

Basically, Eucor continues a long-standing tradition of universities in the Upper Rhine region: after working together for many years, the universities of Basel, Freiburg, Strasbourg, Mulhouse/Colmar and Karlsruhe established a special-purpose cross-border association in 1989 that now pools the potential and expertise of more than 130 scientific institutions. Thanks to Eucor, students from Freiburg, Strasbourg, Haute Alsace, Karlsruhe and Basel can undertake part of their studies at the partner universities. According to Prof. Dr. Hans-Jochen Schiewer, this opportunity gives "new momentum to science policy and recognisable European added value to the region". Such a trilateral offer is of great interest to many of the 115,000 students and 11,000 doctoral students at the European Campus, as dual and triple degrees are available at the Eucor-affiliated universities. The universities are located relatively close to each other within a radius of 200 kilometers, so that classes and other events can be attended on a daily basis.

## Model project for European integration

Since 2015, Eucor – The European Campus has been a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) legal entity designed to facilitate cross-border cooperation between universities. The Eucor coordination office is located in Strasbourg. The individual universities remain autonomous. In early 2016, the university network received funding worth two million euros from the INTERREG-Upper Rhine programmes for a period of three years, and Eucor - The European Campus was officially opened in Strasbourg.

Due to the high density of universities and research institutes, the strategic position on the Upper Rhine offers ideal conditions for a cross-border scientific area. Within education and science, 109 collaborative projects and 30 bi- or trilateral programmes have been launched, which greatly increases competitiveness in a European context.

By acquiring the legal status of an ECGT, the mission of the cross-border university alliance is primarily to reduce bureaucratic red tape in the sharing of the partner universities' competencies. The partner universities are able to jointly appoint staff to professorships, administrative, PhD and

service positions. Eucor preserves the autonomy of the partner universities, while at the same time enabling them to submit joint funding proposals on European level as an autonomous entity. In addition, it is expected that the model project will act as a magnet for young international academics and students and will also be transferable to other border regions.

## Facilitating cross-border studies

A way has to be found to work with the differences in the national scientific systems and to promote cooperation to ensure that class attendance at the Upper Rhine universities functions smoothly. This includes the establishment of joint research programmes and training opportunities at various levels. Moreover, the mutual recognition of academic achievements must also be guaranteed in the three countries. Students can thus complete bi- or trinational courses of study at several universities and put together à la carte study programmes by choosing individual courses or modules at a partner university. This requires a high degree of mobility (tri-regio ticket) and rapid-reaction administration. Since 2014, 16 cross-border courses have been offered within the Eucor university alliance. Since 1989, the universities of Strasbourg, Freiburg and Basel have offered a multilingual biotechnology degree programme with a trinational diploma. The European Campus offers a variety of subjects such as energy efficiency and non-fossil energies, green chemistry, environment, informatics and media technology, life sciences and health, neurotechnology, materials and nanosciences in relation to bioinspired materials and many others related to culture, history and languages.

## Bench and bed immunology

Eucor's main focus is supporting the five universities to develop networks, exchange information and students and develop common project ideas. The focus is less on scientific content or projects and more on mobility programmes and scientific meetings. One of these programmes is a training programme called "Bench and bed immunology" aimed at students, PhD candidates, young doctors and scientists from the participating universities. Prof. Dr. Reinhard Voll, medical director of the Freiburg University Medical Centre's Department of Rheumatology and Clinical Immunology and member of the Centre for Chronic Immunodeficiency (CCI), coordinates the annual meetings, which have been held alternately in Freiburg and Strasbourg for the past six years. He works with Prof. Dr. med. Anne-Sophie Korganow from the Department of Clinical Immunology of the University of Strasbourg. The programme provides participants with insights into the pathogenesis, clinical symptoms and therapy of immunological diseases.



Prof. Dr. med. Reinhard Voll, medical director of the Department of Rheumatology and Immunology is committed to the networking of universities in the Germany-France-Switzerland border triangle.  
© Prof. Dr. Reinhard Voll, Freiburg University Medical Centre

Each year, the programme addresses a different immunology-related issue and each of the 25 to 30 participants contributes actively to the two-day seminar in the form of a poster or oral presentation. "One student presents his or her project, another shows an interesting new starting point, which often leads to scientific collaborations," says the physician. Students and renowned experts also come from other universities and university-associated clinics in Mainz, Baden-Baden and Heidelberg to discuss a specific disease. "We want to offer these young doctors and scientists everything from the theoretical foundations to the latest results from laboratory research and therapeutic approaches in humans," says Voll. "The level is so high that we as professors also benefit from this exchange."

## Focusing on the immune system

In terms of content, the programme focuses on two major clinically relevant immunology topics: on the one hand, rare immune deficiencies in which components of the immune system are missing or in which the body's own immune system is not functioning properly, and on the other hand, autoimmune diseases, in which the immune system attacks the body's own structures. One of our priorities is, for example, systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), a rare autoimmune disease that primarily affects young women and is associated with a butterfly-shaped rash across the face and joint inflammation. In addition to the skin and musculoskeletal system, severe forms of SLE often affect internal organs such as the kidneys, heart and brain, making SLE a life-threatening disease. The human immune defense forms antibodies against its own protein-DNA particles from the cell nuclei, which form complexes and as such can massively damage the kidneys, ultimately causing loss of kidney function.

Another Interreg-funded project collects immunological samples from patients with rare autoimmune diseases in a biobank that are made available to other experts from German, French and Swiss universities for research (double pseudonymised). Networking is essential. "If you want to study the pathogenesis of rare diseases, it is very helpful to work with large numbers of patients, and this can only be achieved through cooperation and networking," says Voll describing the idea of the database.

Participants in the "Bench and bed immunology" programme as well as students pursuing other programmes are very enthusiastic about the exchange opportunities offered by Eucor. They get to know different teaching styles and different approaches to research, and find this highly enriching. They can also earn ECTS credits at other universities, which are recognised at their home university. Obstacles that still need to be overcome are the different semester periods in the three countries that need to be aligned. Public transport connections are not wholly satisfactory either. Also, many students are unaware of the European Campus and its possibilities, so places are often left vacant. Visibility in the public sphere must be increased so that more people understand the potential of the campus. "However, applying for an international programme at Eucor is pleasantly uncomplicated," says Voll. This is already a step in the right direction.

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### Article

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### Further information

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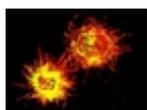
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